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THE PEOPLE & STORIES
BEHIND 30 YEARS OF VIDEOGAMES
PLUS: INTERVIEWS & INSIGHT
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IF THERE'S ONE THING I love almost as much as playing retro games, it's talking about retro games. Like any hardened gamer, I've been chatting to my friends about my fondest sprite-fuelled memories ever since I moved on to my second games machine. And I'll still bend the ear of anyone who cares to listen today. But when it came time to compile the book you now hold in your hands, I felt very differently. A good retro gamer's anthology should be about listening, not talking. Which is why over half of the pages you're about to thumb through feature interviews with some of the finest minds in gaming. Great designers like Tetris creator, Alexei Pajitnov, text adventure maestro, Scott Adams, and even the father of Sonic, Yuji Naka, all happily agreed to chat with us about their most famous videogames. Their memories of and insights into the games we all know and love make for fascinating reading and I hope you'll agree that what they have to say is worth much more than just the simple, uninformed nostalgia of an average gamer like myself. And if you don't agree… Well we've got you covered too. The kicking we give the Commodore 64 conversion of *Street Fighter II*, on page 20, was inspired by my own miserable experience with the game, having wasted all my birthday money on it back in 1992. If only I'd been more willing to listen to the opinions of others all those years ago…

ASHLEY DAY
Deputy Editor





>. CONTENTS . . .






Great Scott
Hello, Segata Sanshiro
The Plastic Surgeon

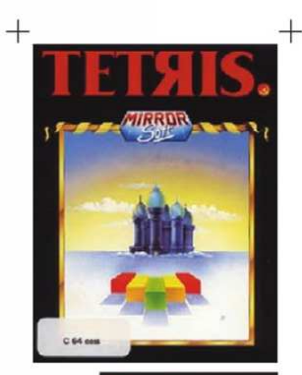
Turn to page 258



BEHIND THE SCENES

TETRIS

In an exclusive interview, games™ speaks to the masterminds behind the original Tetris and the equally groundbreaking Game Boy version to track the evolution of the game from its humble beginnings to the most played game of all time. Read on for the most fascinating saga in videogame history



Released: 1985/1989
Format: PC/Game Boy
Publisher: Freely Distributed (PC) Nintendo (GB)
Developer: Soviet Academy Of Sciences/ Bullet Proof Software



KEY STAFF:
Alexei Pajitnov
Dmitry Pavlovsky
Vadim Gerasmiov
Henk Rogers (Game Boy)

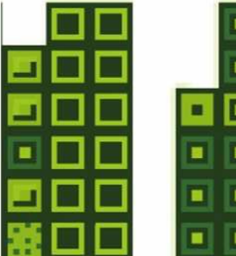
IT'S UNBELIEVABLE WHEN you think about it: the most played, highest selling, most arguably perfect game in existence wasn't born out of the healthy bedroom programming scene of Eighties Britain and didn't come from any of the large, wealthy publishers of the US or Japan, but rather it was conceived in a country almost completely devoid of any videogame culture whatsoever. Alexey Pajitnov, inventor of the original *Tetris* concept explains: "We practically didn't have videogames at that time in Russia. There were five or six electro-mechanical arcade machines installed in the movie theatres and probably one or two types of handheld machine but computers were not for sale at all". So how did the game, voted the 17th best of all time by games™ readers, come to be in such a technologically restricted environment?

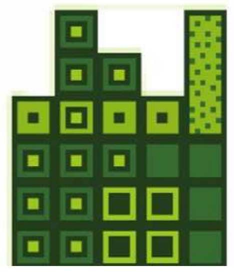
A talented mathematician and film lover, Pajitnov originally worked for the Moscow Institute of Aviation as a maths teacher, but soon became fascinated by the growing power and possibilities of computing. Since such machines were almost impossible to own, Pajitnov quit his job and moved to the Computer Centre of the Moscow Academy of Science where he was assigned to work on a Soviet computer known as the Electronica 60 – a clone of the punch-card-operated PDP-11 computer. While exploring the serious potential of computers including artificial intelligence and voice recognition, Pajitnov found plenty of time to create his own games and puzzles while also playing other developers' computer games that made their way to the Academy. "I saw several other games at the time: *Q-bird*, *Moon-Landing*, *Martial Attack*, *Xonix*. I got the ideas for *Tetris*' difficulty levels and some other game accessories from these games but the main inspiration was from Pentominoes [the classic board game that saw two players competing to fit geometric shapes, made from five squares, onto an eight-by-eight grid]."

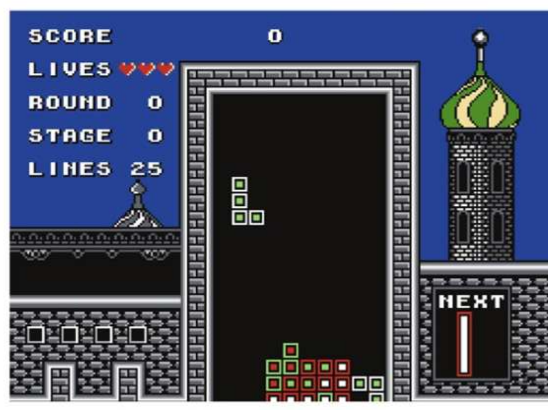
With his inspiration in mind, Pajitnov envisioned a single-player version in which the shapes would

I COULD NOT FINISH TETRIS FOR A LONG TIME BECAUSE I STARTED PLAYING WITH THE UNFINISHED GAME AND COULDN'T STOP



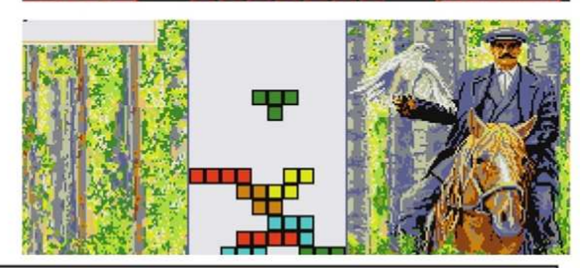




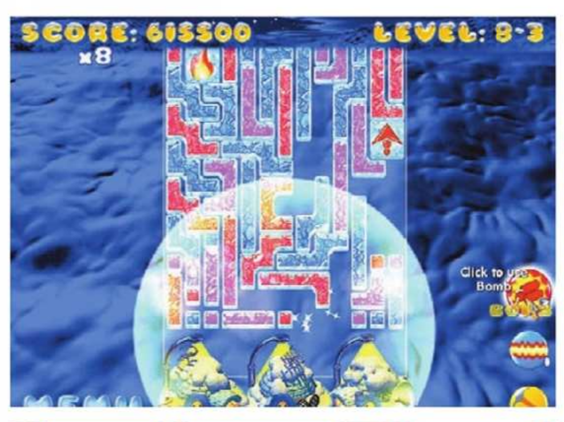


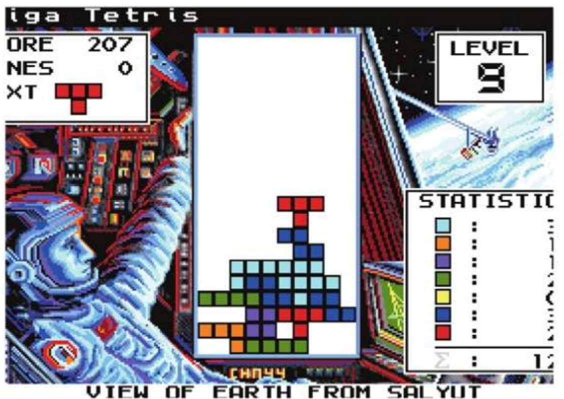


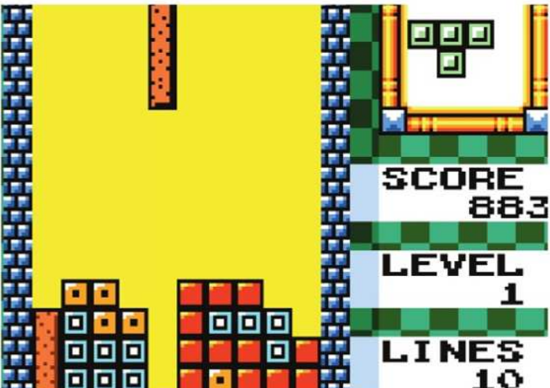
Tetris has been ported to nearly every format imaginable. Including the ill-fated Nintendo Virtual Boy.

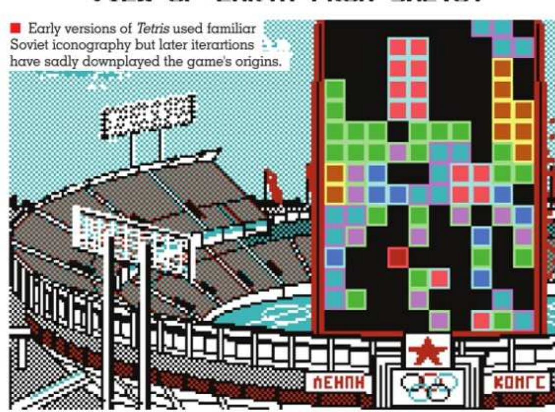


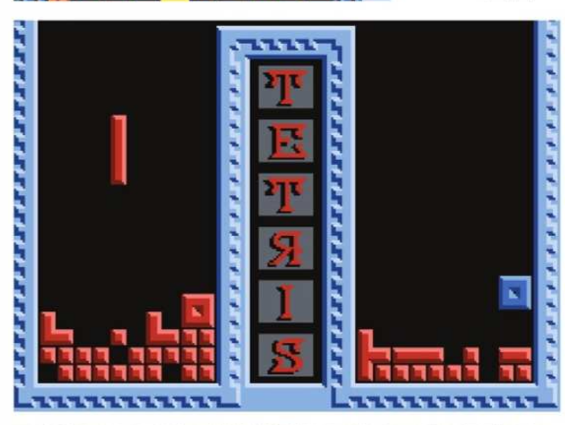


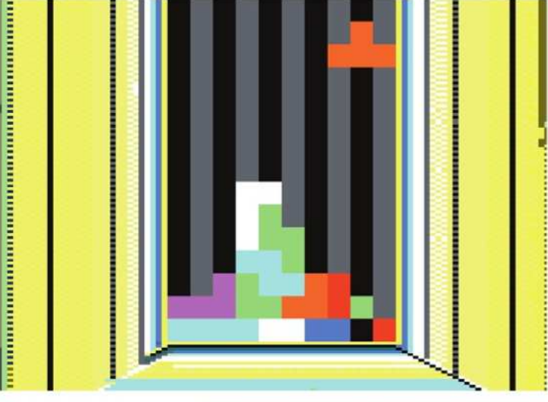


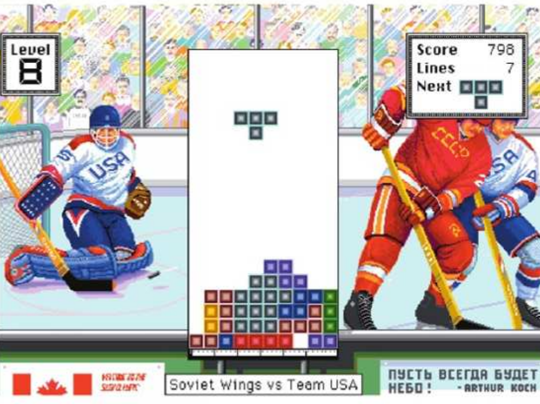


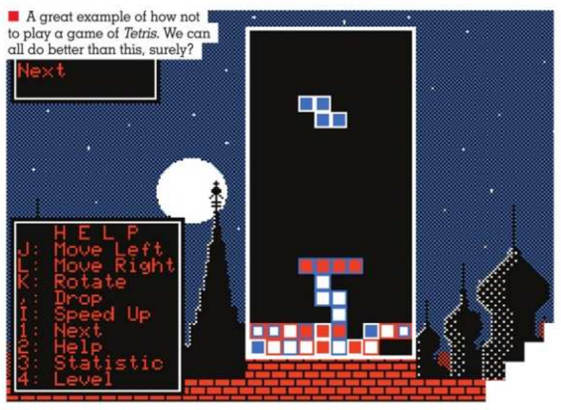



Early versions of *Tetris* used familiar Soviet iconography but later iterartions have sadly downplayed the game's origins.









A great example of how not to play a game of *Tetris*. We can all do better than this, surely?



FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:
UNICRON

I still remember getting a Game Boy for my 10th (I think) birthday. The amount of hours I put into *Tetris* was insane! I still weep when I remember finally finishing level 99! That little orchestra with the musical notes was so not worth the effort.

Posted by:
SHERAK

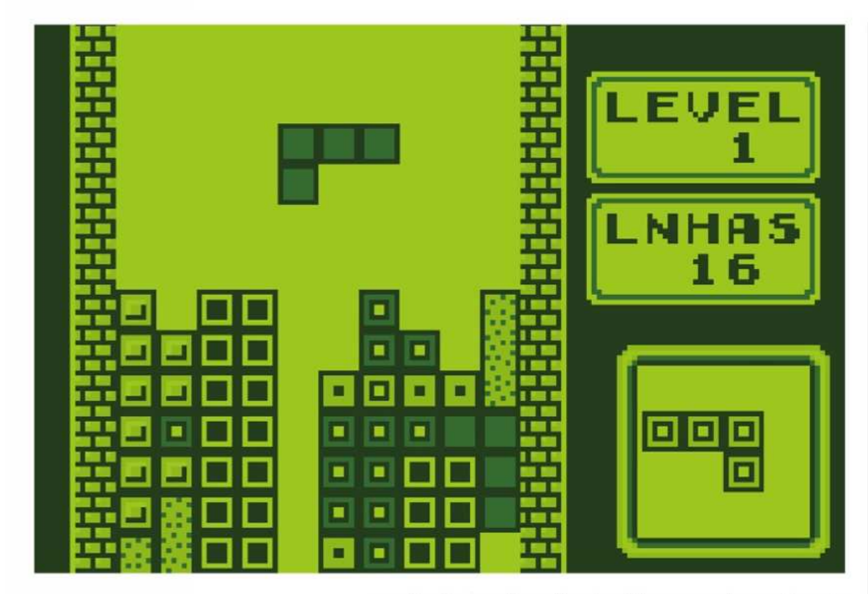
Tetris is the best game ever made, inside and outside its genre, I have tried so many other games that challenge tetris but nothing has ever come close, tetrisphere, dr mario, magnetica, etc, etc... The DS version of *Tetris* is sublime! The best version to date and why? online tetris! this is the best toilet gaming ever, standard is amazing, push is amazing and 4-player is just amazing!... *Tetris* rules Nintendo make the best tetris games.

Posted by:
ROTEK

Tetris, I swear, was the first game I ever played. My dad picked up a second hand Game Boy in some pawnshop, which came with *Tetris* bundled. For that reason, it's always going to have a special place in my heart. But sentimentality aside, it probably is the closest thing to perfect a game can be - simple to play, hard to master; insanely addictive; an infamous soundtrack; doesn't try to do anything superfluous to the gameplay; and even the power to make its way into peoples dreams. Tell me another game that does that.

Posted by:
MERMAN

For me it's all about the atmospheric Wally Beben music on the Commodore 64 version - not the best conversion, but still incredibly addictive.



randomly drop from the sky. After several experiments he realised that the 18 possible Pentomino shapes were too many for the human brain to remember and process at high speeds and so decided to use similar shapes made from just four squares rather than five – thus reducing the total number of unique shapes to just seven. Using the Greek word for four, 'tetra', he named the game *Tetris*. We asked Pajitnov how long it took to develop the groundbreaking puzzler. "I do remember that I did the main part very fast, in about two weeks, but could not finish it for a long time because I started playing with the unfinished game and couldn't stop," recalls Pajitnov, who soon found that tweaking the game to completion was harder than he imagined. "I had lots of designers' decisions to make about the speed, levels, scoring system, some small details of user interface. It's hard to decide in advance what would be better for the other players."

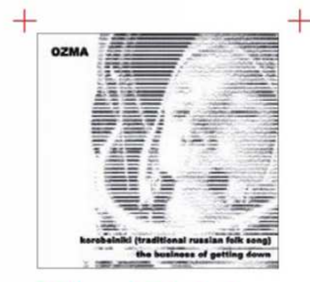


Nevertheless, *Tetris* soon neared completion, but as the Electronica 60 was incapable of displaying true sprites – blocks were made up of spaces outlined by graphics – Pajitnov realised that a full colour version with real, discernable pieces would work much better and asked an acquaintance of his to help convert the game to IBM PC. Vadim Gerasimov was the son of a nuclear physicist and, at 16 years old, an amazingly talented programmer: a natural choice to aid Pajitnov in the Tetris project. The pair spent the next two months tirelessly converting the PASCAL code to work on as many IBM compatible PCs as possible and, when complete, the game was copied to several disks and distributed around the Academy, which led others to copy their own disks and pass them on to colleagues at other computer-literate institutions. The game spread across the Soviet Union swiftly, like a positive virus. "Everyone I gave the game to became addicted and loved it," recalls Pajitnov, "but the authorities didn't care, nobody at the time realised how big such small stuff might be."

What happened over the next three years would require this entire magazine to explain properly, but the short story is that while Pajitnov returned to his Academy duties and worked on new games, 'Tetris Fever' took hold of the world. The game had been unofficially ported to Western computers like Commodore 64 and Apple][, and the rights to the Tetris property had even been traded between several companies who, in reality, had no legitimate claim to the game. The whole affair was a complicated and convoluted saga that is best explained in dedicated books like David Sheff's excellent Game Over.

Our story picks up in 1988. As Nintendo prepared the release of its revolutionary Game Boy console, the head of Nintendo America, Minoru Arakawa, decided that *Tetris* would be the perfect pack-in game for the fledgling handheld. Arakawa turned to Henk Rogers of Bullet Proof Software, who had developed a Japanese PC and Famicom version of *Tetris* with rights that he would later find out had been sold to him illegally without his prior knowledge. Rogers was charged with the task of securing the handheld rights to *Tetris*, which through another series of convoluted events eventually led him to Alexey Pajitnov in the Soviet Union. By this point, all Tetris business was handled by Electronorgtechnica, an organisation responsible for handling the licensing of state-owned technology. The organisation, better known as Elorg, was happy to licence the handheld rights to Rogers, but equally infuriated when he inadvertently drew their attention to the unofficial *Tetris* games that they had no idea were being sold oversees. Elorg immediately began to contact the various companies (including Atari and Sega, among many others) who, in most cases, were

HENK ROGERS
Game Boy Tetris

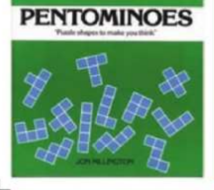


The Tetris Song

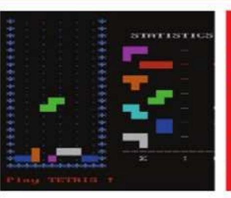
■ AS SYNONYMOUS as the Korobeiniki tune is with *Tetris*, it wasn't always the most recognised theme. Previous versions had featured Tchaikovsky's Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy and Kalinka by Ivan Petrovich Larionov. But it was Bullet Proof Software that first used the tune that we all now know and love as The Tetris Song. "I ordered a couple of Russian songs to be part of the game," explains Rogers, "they worked well with the Russian theme we put behind the game, we even had cossack dancers during 'coffee breaks', and we also chose them because they were free."



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Pajitnov took inspiration from all kinds of games but was mostly inspired by Pentominoes – a 2-player board game using 5-block geometric shapes.



Countless puzzle games were inspired by Tetris's block-dropping gameplay mechanic including Sega's 1990 arcade game, *Columns*.





WHAT THEY SAID...



Dinnertimes come and go, evenings are destroyed and sleep is a thing of the past. You can buy it. You can look at it. You can take the cassette out of the box. But load it at your peril.

Zzap!64, Issue 33, January 1988



unknowingly selling illegal copies of *Tetris*. Although the Russians were understandably angry at the unlicensed *Tetris* games, Pajitnov couldn't help but be a little pleased at the news. "I felt rather flattered," he explains, "I didn't see any royalties at that time so I didn't care for them too much, but they were another recognition of the game's popularity." Rogers meanwhile returned to Japan with the handheld rights to *Tetris*, enabling Nintendo to convert his Famicom version of *Tetris* to Game Boy.



ALEXEI PAJITNOV
Tetris Creator

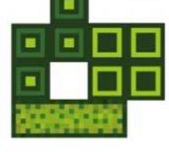
We asked Rogers about his original game and how it differed from other versions. "I invented single, double, triple and *Tetris*," he says, referring to the scoring system for clearing different numbers of lines at the same time, "we were following orders on the button layout so I don't, today, like the buttons we used. Nintendo did not listen and got closer to the layout we use today. They also added two-player mode with sending lines of blocks to the opponent," he says of the Game Boy version.

Upon its release in 1989, *Tetris* took the world by storm all over again with what for many people is the definitive version of the game. Pajitnov himself was very impressed with it, as were his fans. "Oh, I loved it a lot. Everything was done very accurately and nice with the game and I loved the artwork," exclaims Pajitnov, who received considerably more fans thanks to the world-conquering Game Boy port. "A Japanese boy took my autograph on the *Tetris* cartridge and glued it into his Game Boy forever," he adds. Not everyone agrees that the game had such lasting appeal however. "It is regarded by many to be the best because they have not played newer versions," suggests Rogers who concedes that *Tetris* may be especially appealing on handheld platforms in comparison to home consoles and computers. "35 million copies of *Tetris* went out on Game Boy. It is the perfect game for handhelds with small screens and is the number one game on mobile phones. So the secret to its success is that you can play it anywhere anytime."

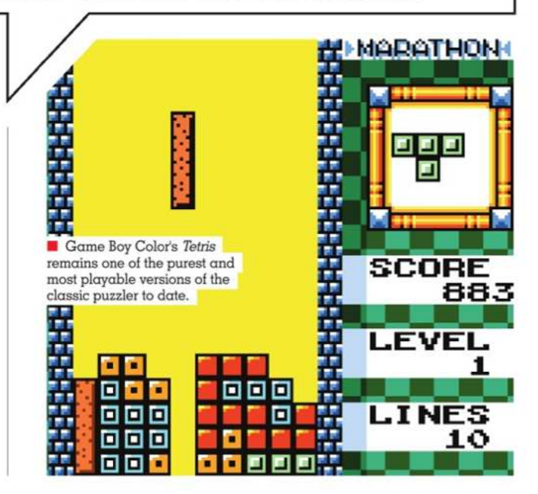
As has since become common knowledge, Game Boy became one of the biggest selling game machines of all time and remained synonymous with *Tetris*… at least until Pokémon arrived. Two years after its release however, the Tetris story continued in an unexpected way for both Pajitnov and Rogers. As the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, the old rules of state ownership were swept away and the change in national politics gave Pajitnov a new opportunity to claim the rights to his own game, for which he had received no royalties aside from a new apartment and his own personal computer. Over the next few years Pajitnov and Rogers would formulate a business plan to secure the rights to all versions of *Tetris* so that Pajitnov could once again have creative control over the direction of the franchise and finally receive financial reward for the millions of game sales he was indirectly responsible for. The pair set up a new company in Hawaii called Blue Planet Software (notice that the initials are the same as Rogers' previous company, Bullet Proof Software) and approached Elorg with their proposal to start what would eventually become the Tetris Company. "I went to Moscow and hammered out an agreement with the privatised leftovers of Electronorgtechnica otherwise we would have been litigating instead of selling *Tetris*," says Rogers. "The most difficult problems to overcome were trying to work with Elorg, who had no idea what we were doing to keep *Tetris* alive and, in fact, improve the game. It took a Herculean effort to buy Elorg in the end but now we are free to do what we want. *Tetris* is doing better than ever."

Indeed it is. Since forming the Tetris Company in 1996, some of the greatest *Tetris* games of all time have been released. Games like *Sega Tetris* in the arcade or Nintendo's *Tetris DS* have played to the strengths of their host hardware while strictly following the core rules laid out by the Tetris Company. And over 20 years on from Pajitnov's original black-and-white prototype, the Tetris phenomenon is showing no signs of slowing down. "Henk and I are making every effort to keep *Tetris* alive," remarks Pajitnov, "the next step is to bring up the online multiplayer versions and try to unify the game across all media to set up the standard to make *Tetris* a virtual sport."

With the *Tetris* franchise evolving with every new generation of hardware and the endless possibilities that new technology like the Wii controller and Xbox Live Arcade will bring to the game, it's almost impossible to think of it as a retro game at all. But deep down in every *Tetris* lies the blueprint drawn out by one man, over two decades ago, in a world without videogames. A more unbelievable success story, the videogame world has yet to see.



WE PRACTICALLY DIDN'T HAVE VIDEOGAMES AT THAT TIME IN RUSSIA



Game Boy Color's *Tetris* remains one of the purest and most playable versions of the classic puzzler to date.

Hall Of Fame… Mario

In the first of this regular series, games™ dissects the design and appeal of a classic videogame character. This month: the world's most famous plumber…

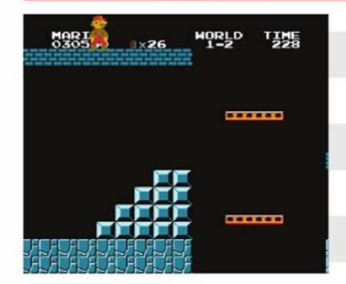
SUCCESS STORIES WERE rare when *Super Mario Bros* hit the Famicom in 1985. We don't need to explain the intricacies of the videogame crash from which the NES emerged, but suffice to say that prior to Nintendo joining the scene things were not good. Mario's first platform outing is often regarded as the game that led to the turn-around of the entire industry, and yet it didn't exactly follow the 'classic game' formula. Unlike trendsetters such as *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*, *Super Mario Bros* was not a pick-up-and-play game in the traditional sense. It wasn't all about getting top scores, it was a test of will and determination that demanded commitment and an analytical approach, and yet players kept coming back.

Super Mario Bros 2 is often referred to as the 'black sheep' of the family, but this is a little misguided when you look at the series as a whole. While *SMB2* may be a rehash of *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic*, Shigeru Miyamoto had far more involvement in its creation than he did in the Japanese *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*. While rumours circulated that *Doki Doki Panic* was remade as a Mario game because the 'true' sequel was deemed too hard for Westerners, there's no denying the impact this game had on the rest of the series, or how much it was in keeping with the spirit of the original game in terms of concept and design philosophy. *Super Mario Bros 2* brought us such superb characters as Shy Guy and Bob-Ombs, it established the ever-lovable Toad as a regular character and also introduced the gaming world to what we believe is its first transvestite character, World 1-1 boss Birdo (it's all explained in the game manual if you don't believe us). The Japanese sequel introduced virtually nothing new, except for some added difficulty, but in keeping with what would become the tradition of the series – and a trademark of Miyamoto's work – *Super Mario Bros 2* is teeming with creativity and 'out there' thinking (you can't even jump on the enemy's head to kill it). In this respect it was everything a *Super Mario Bros* sequel should have been – hardly the oddball cousin it is made out to be.

It was *Super Mario Bros 3* that would firmly establish the series as a cultural phenomenon, however. Once again, the series was pushed in new and exciting directions. However, it shows off most of its newest features right from the start in a comfortably familiar setting. The introduction of flight was revolutionary and rather than saving it for later in the game, Nintendo stuck it right up front where everyone could find it in the opening ten seconds. It was also the first Mario title to use a map screen (which would essentially become playable in the later, three-dimensional years of the rotund plumber), mini-games (now an established staple of the series and platformers everywhere), and actual costumes in the form of the Frog and Tanooki suits. In terms of style, it comes across as the natural successor to the original game, but its depth of gameplay experience, its playfulness with conventions and its wonderfully colourful mix of levels could only have been borne of the much-maligned *Super Mario Bros 2*. By the time Nintendo stepped into the 16-bit arena, the formula was well established but it now had issues with being both late to the market and up against new-found competition in the form of an abnormally fast spiky animal. *Super Mario World*'s success was a slow burn but it's no surprise that despite being a launch title it was the most successful title on SNES.

NO MATTER WHOSE side you may have taken during the great battle between plumber and hedgehog, it's difficult to ignore the fact that it remained the *Super Mario* design that lead the way for platform titles for years to come. Sure, *Super Mario* was slow and may even have felt a little clumsy at times, but its design was rarely short of perfection and never failed to surprise and amaze. The introduction of Yoshi as well as a scaling down of power-ups in *SMW* compared to *SMB3* created a positive balance that endures as well as any of the other Mario games (if not better). By the time Mario returned to the Game Boy, sporting bunny ears in *Super Mario Land 2*, we couldn't really be shocked or surprised any more. In many respects the gimmicks were running out, but we wouldn't want to leave you with the impression that *Super Mario* was just about the tricks and costume changes. Certainly, they played a part in terms of offering gameplay variations and diverting attention, but the core of what made all these games great was evident from the start: an invitation to explore and experiment with no shortage of reward. Discovery was at the heart of *Super Mario*'s brilliance and longevity, which, thankfully, hasn't yet been diminished. And what seemed like madness back in 1985 now makes perfect sense.

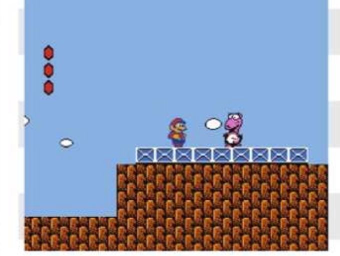
>. MAGIC MOMENTS



Remember the first time you realised you could do this? Videogames haven't been the same since.



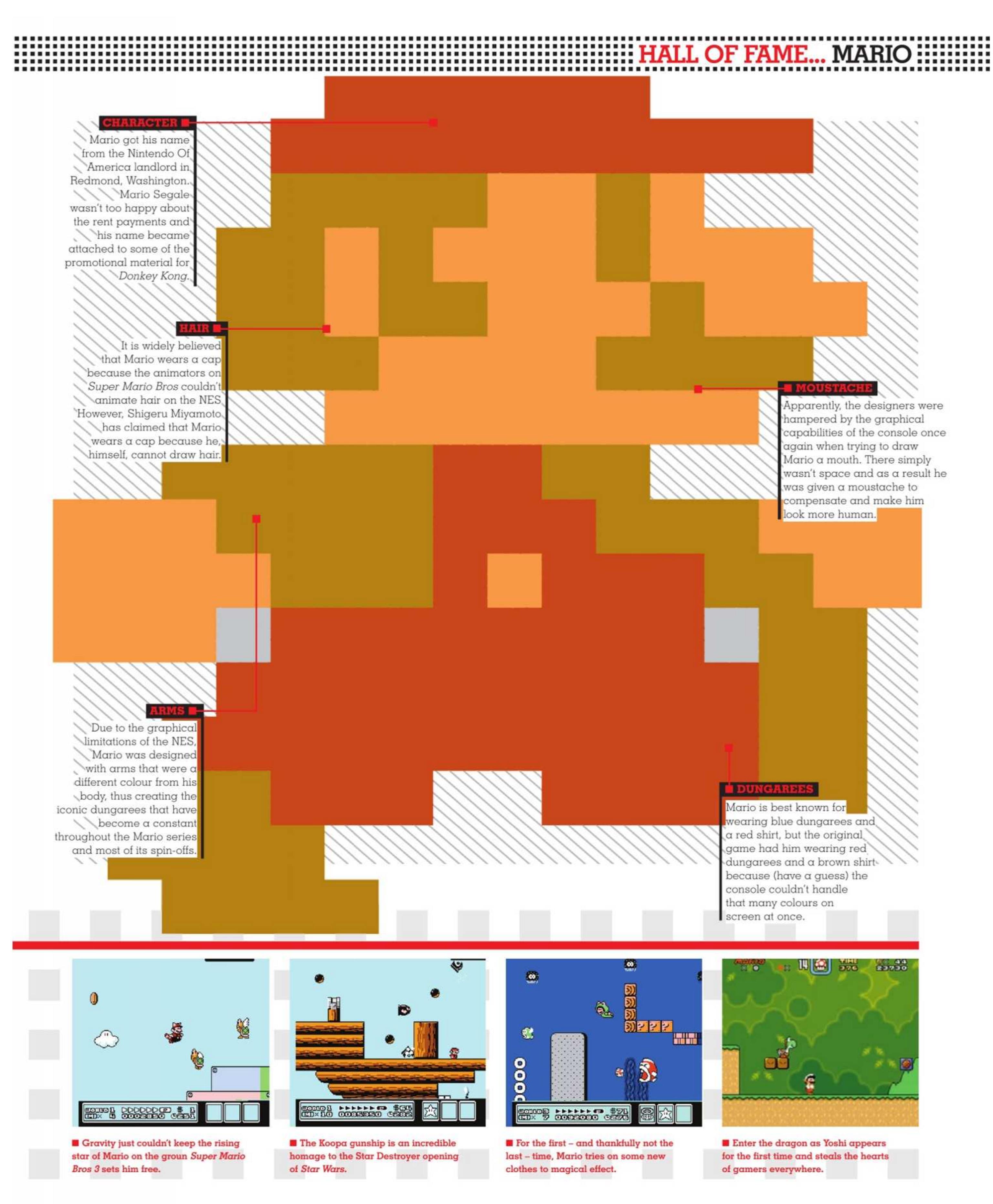
One of the greatest lines in videogame history: "Our Princess is in another castle."



May we introduce Birdo. The first transvestite character in videogames enters stage right.



Super Mario turns into a shooter, which was amazing if rather peculiar given the series history.



CHARACTER

Mario got his name from the Nintendo Of America landlord in Redmond, Washington. Mario Segale wasn't too happy about the rent payments and his name became attached to some of the promotional material for *Donkey Kong*.

HAIR

It is widely believed that Mario wears a cap because the animators on *Super Mario Bros* couldn't animate hair on the NES. However, Shigeru Miyamoto has claimed that Mario wears a cap because he, himself, cannot draw hair.

ARMS

Due to the graphical limitations of the NES, Mario was designed with arms that were a different colour from his body, thus creating the iconic dungarees that have become a constant throughout the Mario series and most of its spin-offs.

MOUSTACHE

Apparently, the designers were hampered by the graphical capabilities of the console once again when trying to draw Mario a mouth. There simply wasn't space and as a result he was given a moustache to compensate and make him look more human.

DUNGAREES

Mario is best known for wearing blue dungarees and a red shirt, but the original game had him wearing red dungarees and a brown shirt because (have a guess) the console couldn't handle that many colours on screen at once.

■ Gravity just couldn't keep the rising star of Mario on the groun *Super Mario Bros 3* sets him free.

■ The Koopa gunship is an incredible homage to the Star Destroyer opening of *Star Wars*.

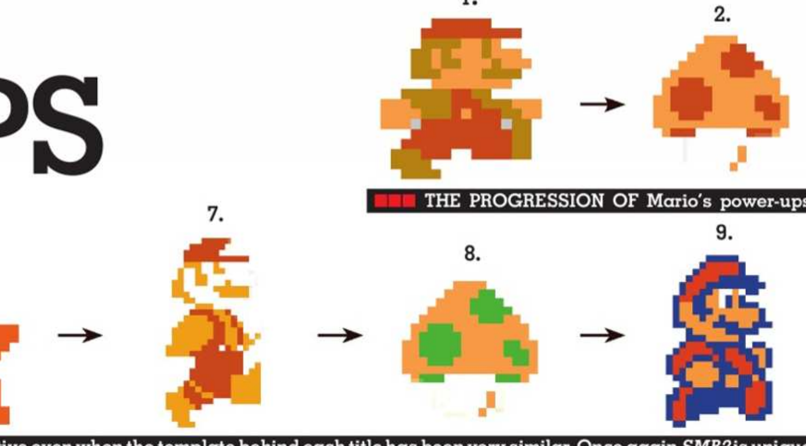
■ For the first – and thankfully not the last – time, Mario tries on some new clothes to magical effect.

■ Enter the dragon as Yoshi appears for the first time and steals the hearts of gamers everywhere.

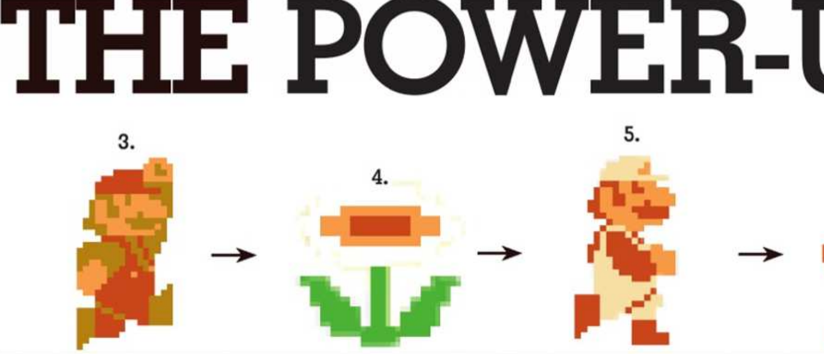


HALL OF FAME... MARIO

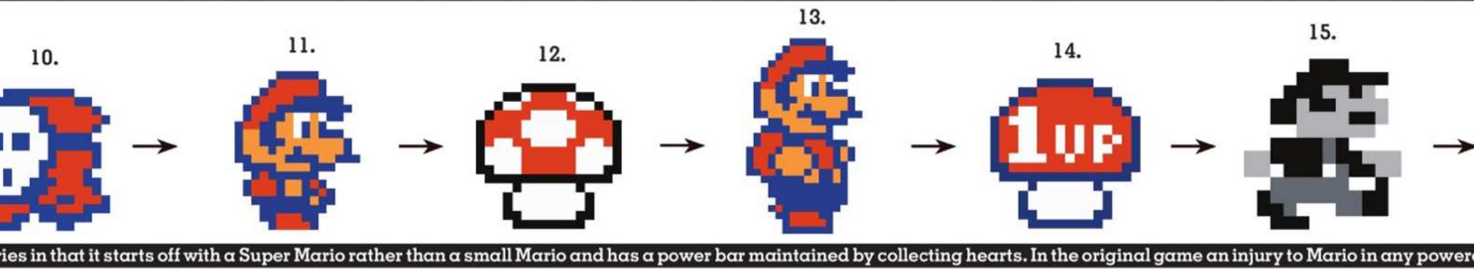
THE POWER-UPS



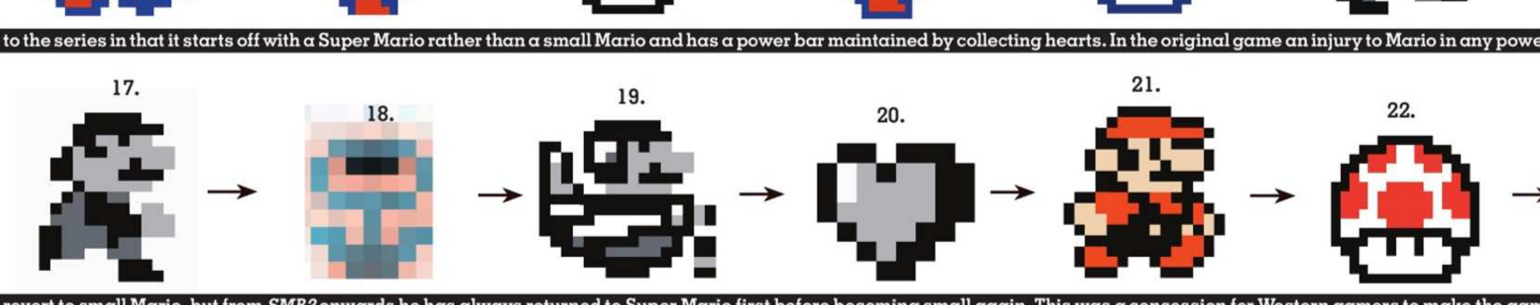
THE PROGRESSION OF Mario's power-ups



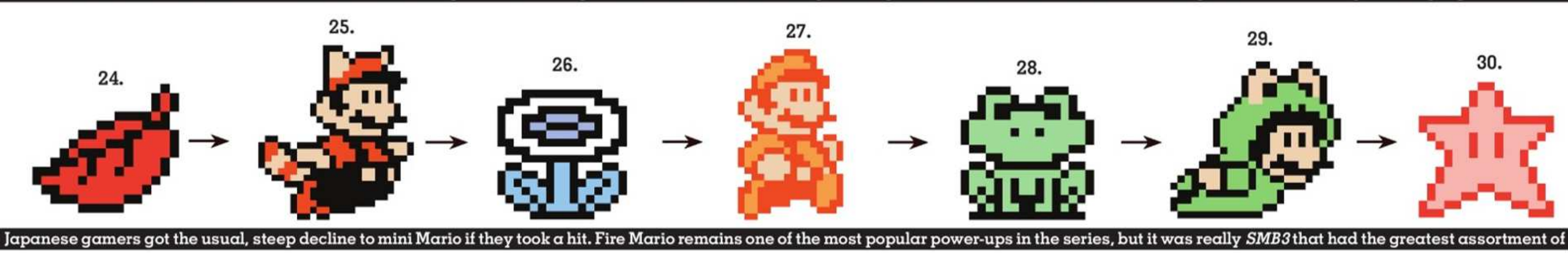
through the series is one of its strongest features and has helped to keep each game feeling fresh and innovative even when the template behind each title has been very similar. Once again *SMB2* is unique



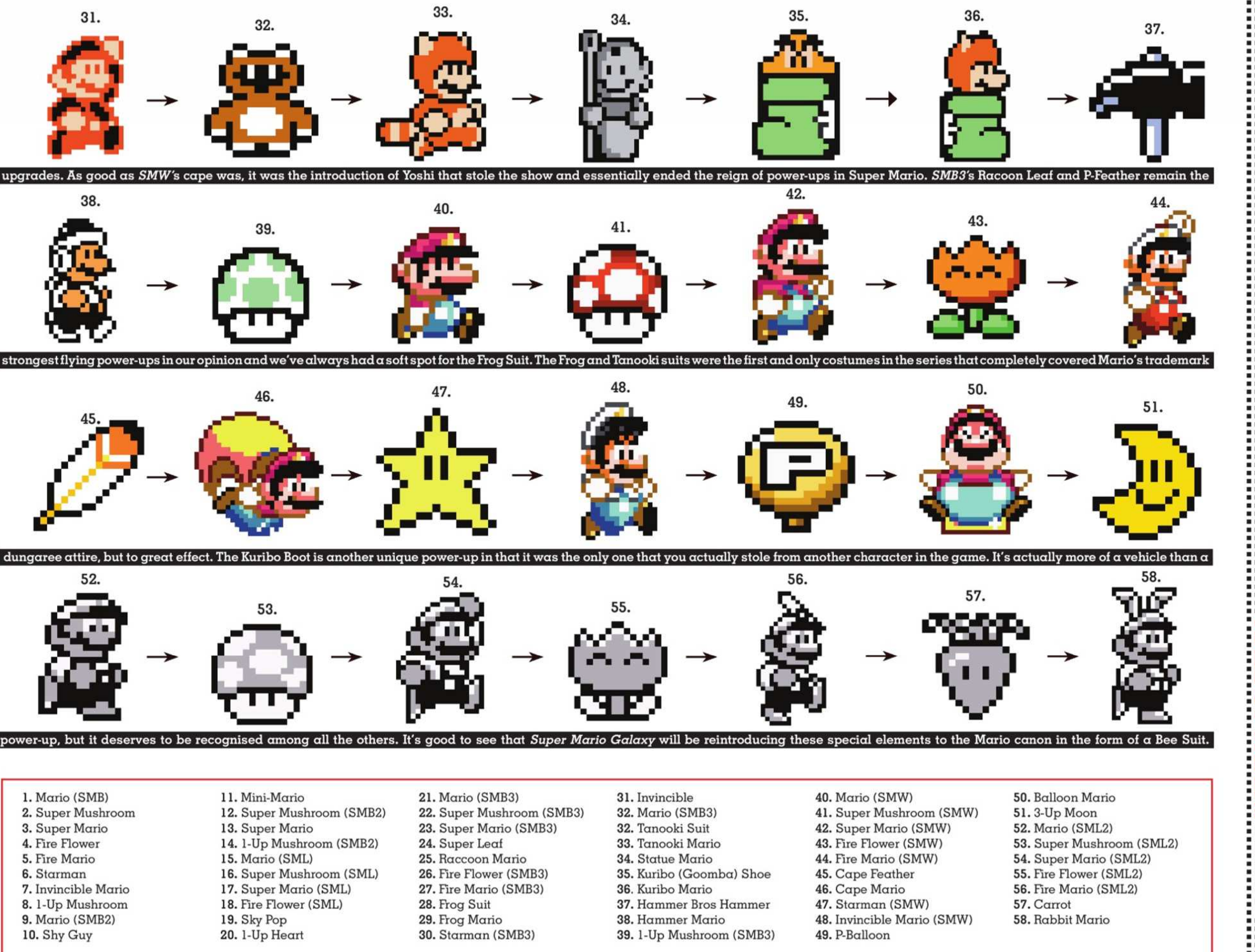
to the series in that it starts off with a Super Mario rather than a small Mario and has a power bar maintained by collecting hearts. In the original game an injury to Mario in any powered state would see him



revert to small Mario, but from *SMB3* onwards he has always returned to Super Mario first before becoming small again. This was a concession for Western gamers to make the games slightly easier, while



Japanese gamers got the usual, steep decline to mini Mario if they took a hit. Fire Mario remains one of the most popular power-ups in the series, but it was really *SMB3* that had the greatest assortment of



upgrades. As good as *SMW's* cape was, it was the introduction of Yoshi that stole the show and essentially ended the reign of power-ups in Super Mario. *SMB3's* Racoon Leaf and P-Feather remain the strongest flying power-ups in our opinion and we've always had a soft spot for the Frog Suit. The Frog and Tanooki suits were the first and only costumes in the series that completely covered Mario's trademark dungaree attire, but to great effect. The Kuribo Boot is another unique power-up in that it was the only one that you actually stole from another character in the game. It's actually more of a vehicle than a power-up, but it deserves to be recognised among all the others. It's good to see that *Super Mario Galaxy* will be reintroducing these special elements to the Mario canon in the form of a Bee Suit.

1. Mario (SMB)
2. Super Mushroom
3. Super Mario
4. Fire Flower
5. Fire Mario
6. Starman
7. Invincible Mario
8. 1-Up Mushroom
9. Mario (SMB2)
10. Shy Guy
11. Mini-Mario
12. Super Mushroom (SMB2)
13. Super Mario
14. 1-Up Mushroom (SMB2)
15. Mario (SML)
16. Super Mushroom (SML)
17. Super Mario (SML)
18. Fire Flower (SML)
19. Sky Pop
20. 1-Up Heart
21. Mario (SMB3)
22. Super Mushroom (SMB3)
23. Super Mario (SMB3)
24. Super Leaf
25. Raccoon Mario
26. Fire Flower (SMB3)
27. Fire Mario (SMB3)
28. Frog Suit
29. Frog Mario
30. Starman (SMB3)
31. Invincible
32. Mario (SMB3)
32. Tanooki Suit
33. Tanooki Mario
34. Statue Mario
35. Kuribo (Goomba) Shoe
36. Kuribo Mario
37. Hammer Bros Hammer
38. Hammer Mario
39. 1-Up Mushroom (SMB3)
40. Mario (SMW)
41. Super Mushroom (SMW)
42. Super Mario (SMW)
43. Fire Flower (SMW)
44. Fire Mario (SMW)
45. Cape Feather
46. Cape Mario
47. Starman (SMW)
48. Invincible Mario (SMW)
49. P-Balloon
50. Balloon Mario
51. 3-Up Moon
52. Mario (SML2)
53. Super Mushroom (SML2)
54. Super Mario (SML2)
55. Fire Flower (SML2)
56. Fire Mario (SML2)
57. Carrot
58. Rabbit Mario



Me at my drawing board back in the Sinclair days.



THE PLASTIC SURGEON

games™ speaks to Rick Dickinson, the man behind the iconic design of ZX Spectrum, who showed gamers that the future was made of rubber

"I THINK PEOPLE buy general products with a combination of three main factors in mind: performance, cost, and aesthetics. The most powerful of all of these can be aesthetics," begins Rick Dickinson, his infinitely casual demeanour belying the high-pressure industry in which he has excelled for almost three decades.

It's impossible to pinpoint the precise reason why we loved, and still love, the ZX Spectrum. There are so many facets to it that thrill and mesmerise. But it should be a simple matter to say why a computer was so distinguished, shouldn't it? It must be because of the technology and software. What else is there to find passion in when it comes to entertainment electronics?

And yet, when we cast a nostalgic glance over the history of British home computing, a flood of artistic iconography sparks our melancholy. When we think of Clive Sinclair's immortal range of game machines, the striking wave of wistful longing is crested, first and foremost, by the inimitable shape of the machine itself. Rick Dickinson is the man who realised that emblematic phizog and put a face on the home-computing revolution, and even he finds it difficult to quantify the appeal of a Sinclair Computer.

"ZX81 was the first and best for me. The visual design was pure and highly refined. And sometimes the first is the best simply because it's the first. We don't know why we like things sometimes," he muses.

Originally from Yorkshire, Dickinson's training carried him the length of eastern England. He completed a four-year honours degree course in Industrial Design at Newcastle, which included various work placements. One such position was in St Ives, near Huntingdon, at an electronics developer called Sinclair Radionics. He stepped through Sir Clive's door at a time of exhilarating transition – the company was approaching the cusp of a revolution as calculators became computers.

"Sinclair was designing and making pocket TVs and calculators," Dickinson recalls. "They were all the first of their kind anywhere in the world. Never been done before. That's how I met Clive Sinclair, as a student. I left to finish my degree and he offered me a job after I graduated.

ZX81 WAS THE BEST. THE VISUAL DESIGN WAS PURE AND HIGHLY REFINED
RICK DICKINSON

I started work at Sinclair Research as Clive's industrial designer. The designer then was John Pemberton, of calculator fame, but he was moving on to another job. John had designed the ZX80 by then, and the timing of his leaving gave us a few months' overlap to help me put the ZX80 into production."

Dickinson's story, almost 30 years later, decants as a fairytale of great timing and immense good fortune, but luck isn't something an industrial designer factors into their world of precision and ergonomics. Dickinson had taken himself to a place where his creative proficiency would be tested by CONTINUED >.

A Spectrum Breakdown

Rick takes us through the iconic visage of ZX Spectrum, and why it looks the way it does

The Connectors

"All standard connectors to cover most eventualities, especially the bus, which would have been more reliable if gold plated. We kept all the connectors out of the back because it's neater and you always know where they are."

The Black Plastic Casing

"It was small and thin, just as Clive Sinclair insisted for all his products. And Sinclair is always black. They just don't look as good in any other colour. We tried."



The Metal Fascia

"It prevents the key mat from falling out, covers the unsightly bits between the keys, and provides a surface for additional key graphics that we could never squeeze onto the key tops alone. The aluminium sheet keeps the product thickness down compared to moulded plastics, and inspired the curve on each side."

The Rubber Keyboard

"To achieve the keyboard, we needed a very different design and manufacturing approach, hence the rubber. In one single component there are all the keys, the actuator movement down, the tactile feedback, the actuator force, the return force, and the return movement all manufactured in a process cycle of a minute. Your keyboard today will have a rubber mat beneath the key tops. Spectrum was first to try it."

The Striped Logo

"This was to show, in an obvious way, that the computer had colour graphics. It was too shrill for my liking and ineffective in more subtle ways, so it was intended to be a 'peel off' sticker. I guess someone liked it. There was a much more restrained use of the flash sticker on the Spectrum Plus."



OUT OF THE BOX

SINCLAIR PUSHED the boundaries in everything it worked on, and although not all of them caused a revolution like the Spectrum, there were some remarkably prophetic products being developed – like the Z88 laptop.

"It's fascinating to look at a Z88 today and compare it with the latest laptops. It was an amazing piece of foresight, and it went into production and sold as a consumer product too. This was perhaps the world's first laptop," recalls Dickinson.

Released in 1987, the Cambridge Computer Z88 was an A4-sized, lightweight, low-powered Z80-based portable computer designed by Clive Sinclair. It came with built-in word processing, spreadsheet and database applications, and cost a measly £200. It certainly impressed *Your Sinclair* magazine, which was awestruck by the potential the machine held. "It will eventually be expandable to a breathtaking 4MB of memory."

And that's no small amount of silicon in those days, we're sure you'll agrree.



fire, casually accepting the kind of challenges that would make an industry veteran recoil in anticipation of the harsh deadlines, late nights, and sheer weight of dedication the job would demand. He may not have had the walls full of awards, accomplishments, and achievements that decorate his office today, but he carried with him the relaxed fortitude to prevail that would be built into the ZX Spectrum itself – a plastic, metal, and rubber mirror of Dickinson's personality.

When combined with an innovative juggernaut such as Sinclair Research, the pool of talent is always bubbling hot, not least of all because of Dickinson's boss, friend, and mentor, the man who lent his name to such incredible products.

"Clive is an extraordinary man," Dickinson begins, as he gladly struggles to put Sinclair and the time he spent working with him into mortal words. He contentedly resigns the task as insurmountable, and continues: "I consider myself very lucky to have worked with him for so long and so closely. A privilege, in fact. He was good at everything. Extremely creative, with great foresight, and technically brilliant. He had great ideas and, unusually, the ability to combine all these things to bring a successful product to the market. How many other individuals do you know that can do that?"

Sir Clive Sinclair had a natural grasp of the manufacturing outcome. He possessed the ability to see a culminating whole in the infinite number of individual entities that form the foundations of design. This was a remarkable quality, and one Dickinson, as a designer and a man of vision, could appreciate. And, as he explains, it's a vital characteristic still guiding the industry today.

"Clive was fanatical. At times he would put design above everything else. His products had to be small and thin and elegant, with perfect surfaces. Apple is just the same today. Aesthetics come first. Create the desire, then compromise all the internal stuff that will never fit in until half of the spec is chucked out.

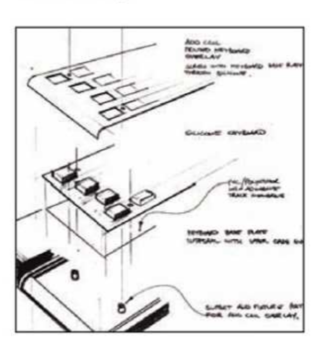
He was also very clever at knowing how to get the best from someone and drive them to new levels of achievement they never thought possible," continues Dickinson. "Somehow he just had that magic ingredient to drive an impossible idea to fruition. On a personal level, I like him a great deal. Very funny, razor sharp, awesome articulation. Tough and explosive at times, and very sensitive and humane at others," he recalls.

It seems Sinclair possessed a unique form of unilateral perception. The concepts, the products, the people – everything and everyone he surrounded himself with had the potential to become something great. The company was an incubator and a catalyst for distinction. But it wasn't by pure luck or by chance that Dickinson found his place there.

I CONSIDER MYSELF VERY LUCKY TO HAVE WORKED WITH CLIVE FOR SO LONG RICK DICKINSON

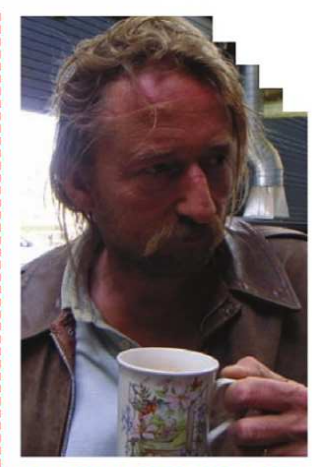
"Working at Sinclair was just the best. Absolutely. Whatever was designed and made at Sinclair, you knew it had never been done before. It was a clean sheet of paper each time," he recalls. The romance of Sinclair Research's saga is misleading, however wonderful it might be. We, the grateful gamers, see a magical machine and it conjures involuntary images of a whirlwind of creativity that, knowingly, and with an almost divine insight, built a childhood for the Eighties. But there was no whirlwind, and even though Sinclair was the CONTINUED >.


Sir Clive Sinclair at the ZX81 Design Council award ceremony at the Barbican with HRH Prince Philip.


A design document, demonstrating how the Spectrum's iconic metal fascia would be fixed to the casing.


Dickinson designed many Sinclair peripherals, including these 'donut' joysticks, which were palm operated.

Getting To Know Rick Dickinson



First system you worked on:
ZX80

First computer/videogame you played:
Science of Cambridge's *MK14*

First game system you owned:
Never needed to buy one, they were all just lying around the labs

Favourite computer/videogame system of all time:
Loki (is that cheating?)

Favourite game of all time:
That's like asking my favourite actress

Currently playing:
I go skiing now, instead

Current job/place of employment:
I run my own design business out of Cambridge

If someone wanted to follow in your footsteps, what advice would you give them?
I always found life confusing and with no clear path to follow, but with enough thought and agony and frustration I managed to figure a way through each time. You need enthusiasm to drive it, which you can eventually find if you just keep trying. The Sinclair experience was partly 'right place, right time, right job' and potentially put me on the map early on. So it's being open to opportunities, being positive, having a 'can do' attitude, being receptive, listening more and saying little. Be wary of being opinionated… even if you think others are wrong. The most ignorant or stupid person can teach you something useful. Accept the improbable as being just that, but not impossible. It's the same for any job or career: get into the industry any way you can and just keep going.

Personal motto:
Problems can be solved by organising your thoughts and acting upon them.

Your message to the world's gamers:
Thanks. You helped me by being enthusiastic about the products I helped design. It won't be long now before the ultimate game. *Red Dwarf*'s virtual reality device, is available to all, just to escape the hardest game of all – life.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Spectrum's rubber keyboard was made in a condom factory
- All Spectrums are very slightly bowed
- Sinclair QL (Quantum Leap) was moulded in a Swedish Electrolux fridge factory
- A lot of the Spectrum Plus design work was done in the Sinclair aeroplane
- The ZX81 Ram Pack was designed for the ZX80
- ZX81 was exported to Japan and the USSR
- When Dickinson visited the Italian factory to check the mouldings that hold the buttons on the QL, he turned it upside down and they fell off. He asked them to fine tune the fit, but was overruled as the factory didn't have time
- Most keyboards at the time had up to 500 moving parts – ZX Spectrum had six
- Thousands of ZX power supplies arrived in Canada by air with their insides rattling. This was caused by the case screw bosses being slightly too short, and cracking off due to the extremely cold flight.
- Sinclair experimented with a white casing for Spectrum Plus, and a brushed aluminium finish for ZX Spectrum
- ZX Spectrum was originally going to be called ZX81 Colour

attentive godparent of home computing, it was born from passionate, protracted, and arduous labour.

Those iconic computers were the result of a tested inspiration, and it vexes the layman's mind as to how such a stylised yet functional symbol is given its shape. Dickinson's casual disposition adds an air of effortlessness to understanding the process, as he walks us through the genesis of his work: "A product can attract your attention in a split second, amid a crowd of other products and distractions. The aesthetics can then seduce you into a situation of desire. At this point, cost might come to mind, and performance, and then the justification process kicks in. At Sinclair Research we had little time to develop each product, and when time is short there's a tendency to shoot from the hip and go by instinct, rather than prevaricate or have opinion meetings," explains Dickinson, happy to admit that such rigid deadlines came with inherent problems.

"We never knew where each product would go in terms of future peripheral expansion or add-ons, so it was tricky to provide a mechanical and electronic port. If we were able to design our products with all the peripherals in mind from the start, it would be easier to provide a logical and sound expansion route. I wanted to improve the expansion capabilities during the ZX81's design phase and develop a dedicated connection system for peripherals. I wasn't allowed this on the grounds of speed to market and cost. The ZX80 RAM-pack design and casing had to fit the ZX81. The same connection system ended up in the Spectrum too. How crap is that?" laughs Dickinson.

It's reassuring to hear proof of people like Dickinson's mortality. For many, there was no fault to be found in the computers of our youth – especially since we began such profound retrospective worship. We've made those shortcomings and quirks into beloved features, excited by the prospect of adjusting an azimuth screw with a bent paperclip and bolstering a RAM pack with Blu-tack and the inlay from an old game box.

Endearing as these shortcomings may have been, they were also the vehicle for improvement.



I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS DOING AT THE TIME; I JUST DID WHAT SEEMED RIGHT RICK DICKINSON



CLIVE SINCLAIR
Sinclair Research

From Dickinson's adept and well-used drawing board came the ZX Spectrum: the single most iconic visage home computing has ever known. Sinclair's solitaire shone brightly in the rising electronic sun. "It was difficult to be influenced by other home computer designs, because the Sinclair stuff was just so different before you even remotely thought about how they might look," he explains. "There was no choice but to start from scratch and create a new identity."

And even he, when faced with the question he's repeatedly yet jovially answered for over 25 years, finds it difficult to isolate precisely what is it about the rubber-keyed marvel that makes it so wonderfully characteristic. "It's hard to know," he confesses. "The small compactness of the design is the first sign. It's thin and elegant, the detail is well considered and the parts well manufactured. There's a cool and sophisticated use of black colours and different materials. Injection-moulded plastics, pressed and punched aluminium sheet, compression-







There were various prototypes for ZX Spectrum. Rick Dickinson was the man behind the designs, bringing us the famous rubber keyboard.



■ The keyboard was easily one of Spectrum's most memorable features. Here's one of Dickinson's early schematics.

■ What a computer designer's workspace looked like before the days of CAD software.

moulded silicone rubber. Most products present only plastics. There was also an almost extravagant use of printed colour for the graphics, yet cautiously managed and utterly functional. Perhaps the product has a jewel-like compactness of form, detail, and colour, compared to others of the time that were much larger, plain, and visually unsophisticated or unrefined. Besides all that, it simply looked like nothing else," he laughs.

■■■ And, in light jest, perhaps Dickinson has determined the ZX Spectrum's true defining feature: its uniqueness. Individuality and an earnest personality permeated everything about the early days of Sinclair Research. Talking with Dickinson, the physical enigma of those wonderful designs begin to unravel. The thought that someone's personality can be so acutely reflected in an inanimate electronic product seems preposterous, but Sinclair Computers epitomise the creative wealth of the people who made them. Such a realisation adds significant profundity to the already evocative machines, and drastically reinforces the computer's place in retro gaming history.

It's no wonder, then, that when people learn of Rick Dickinson's participation in putting such a noble face on the home computing scene they feel like they're in the presence of a luminary – the living realisation of the ZX Spectrum itself. "I'm constantly amazed," says Dickinson, completely sincere in his bewilderment at having become an icon by proxy of his own creation. "People just love the Spectrum. When I tell them, it's as though they've just met a celebrity. Most people seem to know something about it, or have owned one. It makes me grin. I didn't know what I was doing at the time; I just did what seemed right with the given restraints. I was practically a kid. It was great fun, and it was very difficult."



GIZMONDO

The promising handheld that didn't catch on

DICKINSON'S GAME system designs didn't end with Spectrum. Most recently, he put an equally characteristic shape on the handheld Gizmondo, as he explains:

"Gizmondo was great fun. There was a real sense of happening and excitement. It did everything. It was compact and rugged, with GPS and a GSM camera. It was all about ergonomics. And keeping it small and beautiful as the spec increased was very difficult. We had to take into account holding it in two hands while viewing the screen, and being able to control both D-pads and the top keys.

While we were working on Gizmondo, I felt that videogame hardware, at the time, was lacking in visual sophistication. The target audience was mostly teenagers, and as a consequence manufacturers were designing their game products to be more toy like than I thought was appropriate. Teenagers are equally as sophisticated in what they like, if not more so. A few months later PSP came out and blew us all away with its sophisticated looks.

I think, with fewer spec changes during its development (which also caused delays), Gizmondo would have been launched much earlier, had time to grow more games, and be sufficiently established in its own unique right before PSP came out.

I think that the rumours are true, in the sense, that a resurrection is being seriously investigated and considered. I have been indirectly in contact, and I would love to work on the next Gizmondo.



CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing console ports under the spotlight



SYSTEM FAILURE

Format: C64
Year: 1992
Publisher: US Gold
Developer: Capcom USA

STREET FIGHTER II

THE HYPE



AS ONE OF the most coin-guzzling arcade games since *Pac-Man*, *Street Fighter II* was a social phenomenon in the early-Nineties and a perfect arcade conversion was the Holy Grail of the time. While SNES and Mega Drive owners fought over who had the best port, 8-bit micro users apprehensively loaded their tapes, hoping not to be disappointed. The C64 version seemed promising: it came in a big box, at the luxurious price of £12.99 and featured the official stamp of approval from Capcom. Commodore magazines raved about the game in the run up to release, splashing Ryu and Ken all over their covers, but would their enthusiasm be rewarded?

THE WARNING SIGNS

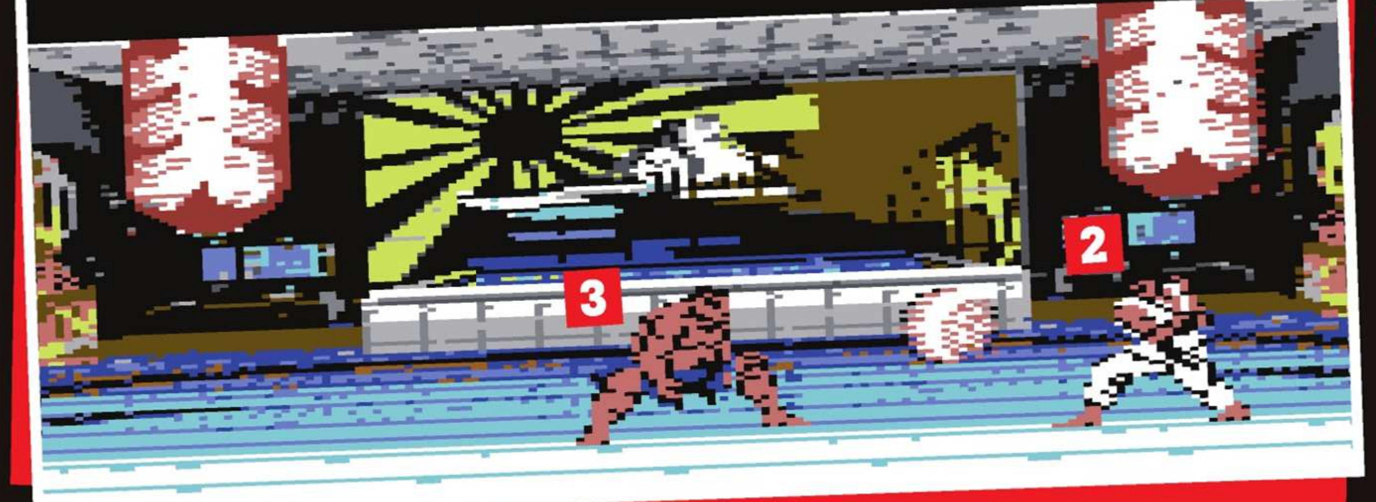
US Gold wants you to think this is a bigger and better C64 game than any you've played before. But maybe it's a more literal kind of 'monster'.

The blurb says: "The game that machines were made for." They don't mean C64, though. We're pretty sure they're referring to expensive JAMMA cabs, or maybe consoles that didn't exist yet, like Saturn.



We assume these alternate languages are just translations of the top paragraph. But what if they're actually foreign review quotes, telling you that the game is awful?





THE REALITY

Right from the start, C64's Street Fighter II was a mess. After about five minutes of loading, you'll pick a character but you don't get to play with him. Nope, it's off to the loading screen again before you can play the first fight, plus another load for each opponent you face, as well as a return to the loading screen again, for old time's sake, just to watch the ending. Worse still, the game looks like a two-year-old's colouring book and is virtually uncontrollable to play. At certain points, the game will even glitch and leave your fighter walking around near the top of the screen. It's funny now, but no C64 owners were laughing back in 1992.

1 Almost half of the screen is taken up by the energy bars, which squash the 'action' down into the shape of a letterbox. Seriously, who needs that much space just to see the name of their character and whether they're winning or losing?

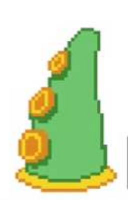
2 Believe it or not, this is actually meant to be Ryu. At first glance we thought he was just a glitch in the background art, but it's actually a man with his arms folded back. We've seen better graphics on Teletext, and better gameplay, actually.

3 With just a joystick and a single button to control what should be a six-button game, C64's Street Fighter II can be a bit wooden at times. Honda's simple moves are just about the only attacks you'll manage to activate, without fluking it.

What You Should Have Played It On



Anything really. Even the Spectrum version was better than this. The best at the time, however, was the SNES version with its chunky graphics and fast,responsive controls. It made the C64 looklike an Atari 2600.



BEHIND THE SCENES

MANIAC MANSION + DAY OF THE TENTACLE

On the twentieth anniversary of SCUMM, ex-LucasArts legends Ron Gilbert and Dave Grossman speak to games™ about the creation of two of the greatest adventure games of all time. Prepare for laughter, shock revelations and the odd tearjerker as we go back… to the mansion





Released: 1987/1993
Format: Various
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: In-House

KEY STAFF:

MANIAC MANSION

Ron Gilbert
(Designer, Programmer, Writer)

Gary Winnick
(Designer, Artist, Writer)

DAY OF THE TENTACLE

Dave Grossman
(Designer, Programmer, Writer)

Ron Gilbert
(Writer)

Tim Schafer
(Designer, Programmer, Writer)

LUCASARTS' CLASSIC ERA of adventure games spans from 1987 to 2000 and may be the most flawless body of work in the history of the medium. Short lived though it may have been, it represents both a developer and a genre at the height of their creative potential. Before LucasArts entered the scene, the 'point-and-click adventure' struggled to break free of the technical limitations of its closest ancestor, the text adventure. And once the developer bowed out of the genre with *Escape From Monkey Island*, it seemed that the movement had lost its greatest innovator. At the centre of that 13-year period were two games that shaped the values and techniques that have since defined the adventure genre. They were the seminal *Maniac Mansion* and its equally influential sequel, *Day Of The Tentacle*.

When *Maniac Mansion* debuted on the Commodore 64 in the winter of 1987, it breathed new life into a stale genre. Text adventures had existed for 12 years by this point and although they had started to incorporate illustrations and real-time graphics during the early-Eighties they still worked in almost the same way as they always had. *Maniac Mansion* reinvented the ancient play style by moving toward a full graphical user interface. No longer were players forced to guess the correct verbs and adjectives to solve a puzzle. Instead they used a small number of pre-defined commands to manipulate the world in front of them. The focus shifted squarely CONTINUED >.







MANIAC MANSION BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO THE STALE ADVENTURE GENRE





















Posted by:
JAMES

Other adventure games asked you to combine, say, a key with a piece of rope in order to make a new tool – and you'd be confused as hell. In *Day Of The Tentacle* however, using things like spaghetti, horse teeth and a laugh-in-a-box to help a long-dead mummy win a Crufts-style show for humans made perfect sense.

Posted by:
SUPERBEASTO

Day Of The Tentacle had a brilliant look and was genuinely funny. I loved that the puzzles incorporated the time travel in a really smart way, not hard enough to be impossible without a guide, but hard enough that you feel like a right smart arse when you work it out. Classic.

Posted by:
DANTE76

A graphical update would make *Maniac Mansion* a winner. That game hurt my eyes.

Posted by:
BLOODBATH MCGINTY

Maniac Mansion is scarier than *BioShock*. I'm not being funny but it gives me the creeps.

Posted by:
SARAH ELTON

How can anyone not love Hoagie's chats with the founding fathers? LucasArts in that era was spot on with its point-and-clicks. Good puzzles, good storylines revealed at a pace that kept you interested, and genuine laugh-out-loud humour.

Posted by:
DION DIABLO

The way the time zones affected the puzzles was one step ahead of similar games in terms of script, structure and humour. You could enjoy it even if you weren't playing.

onto the puzzles and the story, right where it belonged, which immediately made for a less frustrating, more entertaining experience.

Maniac Mansion's revolutionary new style was concocted by two employees of what was then called Lucasfilm Games. Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick had worked at the company since the early part of the decade; Gilbert porting C64 games to Atari 800 and Winnick animating most of the major titles that the developer put out. In 1985 the two were asked to work on their own original title together. Re-inventing a genre was far from their primary objective.

Aside from making its games as user friendly as possible, LucasArts' other talent was the ability to tell a great story, which is exactly where Winnick and Gilbert started with their first title. "Gary and I loved bad horror movies," reveals Gilbert, "and as we started to kick around some story ideas for a game, doing comedy-horror was natural for both of us." And so the idea of setting the game in a haunted house (or 'maniac mansion') was born. Resident psychopaths are a common theme of horror movies, and *Maniac Mansion* had the prime example of such a lunatic in Dr Fred, a mad scientist coerced by a sentient meteor into creating a pair of evil talking tentacles and kidnapping the locals. For the heroes, Gilbert designed a cast of seven teenage characters.

In a design choice that is entirely unique to *Maniac Mansion*, only three of the seven characters could actually be played throughout a single game. The main character, Dave, always had to be used, but his two allies could be freely selected from the other six. Each of these had individual skills and resources as well as very distinct personalities. "Almost every character in the game is based on a real person that Gary and I knew," says Gilbert. "But I'm not going to tell you who they are."

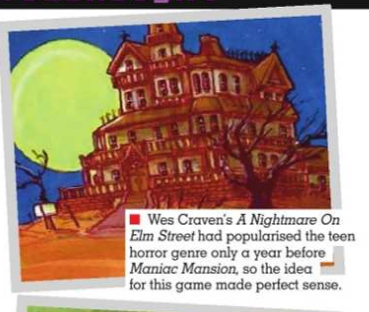
WRITER, DESIGNER
Ron Gilbert

Due to its many combinations of playable characters, the implementation of their own specific puzzles and the game's multiple endings, *Maniac Mansion* was a necessarily complex game. Gilbert and Winnick spent months working out all the possible eventualities in advance of the development phase, which naturally extended production time way beyond that of any previous Lucasfilm game. "I almost got fired because the game was taking so long," reveals Gilbert, adding, "there were three or four characters that did not make it into the game because it was getting too big."

■ Ron Gilbert on SCUMM-VM. "It's one of the greatest things I've ever seen. It allows people to play all these great graphic adventures that would otherwise be lost. SCUMM-VM should be given some big industry award."

With so much time and effort spent on the story and puzzles alone, it's a wonder the *Maniac Mansion* team were able to add anything else to the game. And yet Gilbert's disappointment with rival companies' own adventures soon saw him staying up until 3am each night in an attempt to program an adventure system that lived up to his expectations.

"After I started programming, I realised that I was not going to be able to make a game as complex as *Maniac Mansion* without a good scripting language, and so SCUMM was born," says Gilbert. SCUMM stood for 'Script Utility Creation for Maniac Mansion' and, in Gilbert's own words, was a "system that could be used on many adventure games, cutting down the time it took to make them." SCUMM certainly achieved this aim. It was used in 11 games over the following ten years. More importantly, several other adventure developers, such as Sierra, Revolution and Adventure Soft, soon began to introduce similar systems to SCUMM in their own games. The reason for this was not just because of the way it streamlined development but also because of the way it made the games more fun to play. "My goal with *Maniac Mansion*," explains Gilbert, "was to make an adventure game that didn't require any typing but still followed the structure of a classic text adventure. All of the adventure games of



■ Wes Craven's ***A Nightmare On Elm Street*** had popularised the teen horror genre only a year before *Maniac Mansion*, so the idea for this game made perfect sense.



■ "There's something about breathing life into a character, using nothing but words, that I find compelling." Dave Grossman



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Adventures, like *King's Quest*, required text commands. *Maniac Mansion* changed that forever.



Day Of The Tentacle's time-travel puzzles made the *Maniac Mansion* formula that much more complex.





Refined storytelling and puzzle techniques in LucasArts titles led to modern masterpieces like *Sam & Max Season 1*.



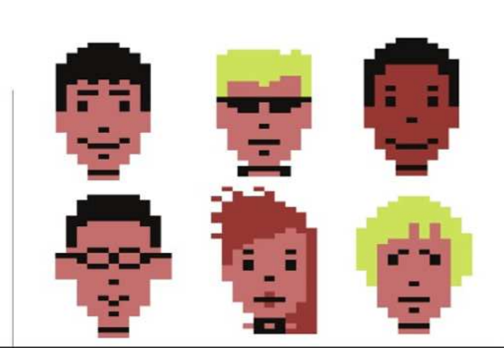
The Cutting-Room Floor

ALTHOUGH MANIAC MANSION was eventually ported to several platforms, the most infamous has to be the heavily censored NES version. The notoriously family-friendly Nintendo felt uneasy about some of the scenes in the original C64 game and asked that Lucasfilm Games remove them. The line 'brains sucked out' was changed to 'brains removed' for example, while a recreation of Michelangelo's *Dawn* statue was removed for its nudity. Ironically, Nintendo of America failed to remove the most offensive scene in which the player is able to microwave a pet hamster to death. The mistake was noticed just in time to stop it being included in the PAL version however. On the subject of *Maniac Mansion*'s dark humour, Gilbert says: "We never set out to shock anyone but we also didn't want to make a kiddie game. Both Gary's humour and my own can sometimes be a little crude, so I think that just came out in the game.

the time required typing, and this is understandable given that most of them were text based. A few games, most notably the Sierra ones, had graphics but they still required typing. I never understood this and felt that it was only taking it halfway."

That Christmas, critics and fans alike hailed *Maniac Mansion* as a masterwork of the adventure genre. Its dark comic tone, the multiple story branches and its use of the new SCUMM system made it the greatest adventure of the year and cemented Lucasfilm Games' position as the genre's most prominent developer. The game was a resounding success, yet Gilbert himself was not entirely satisfied with the results. "The biggest design mistake is that you can get the game into an un-winnable state if you use some items in the wrong way," he reflects. "This is one of the lessons I learned and then applied to *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. It is impossible to put *Monkey Island* into a state where you cannot win it and have to go back to a save game. The other mistake is how cut-scenes happened. The whole idea for cut-scenes, hence the name I gave them, was that they 'cut' away from the game. Unfortunately, I had this on a timer, rather then triggered from an event. So, you might be right in the middle of something and, bang, a cut-scene would happen."

These design faults were, of course, ironed out over Lucasfilm's following games such as *Monkey Island*, though there were certain improvements that Gilbert wished to make that just weren't possible



SEVERAL CHARACTERS DIDN'T MAKE IT INTO THE GAME BECAUSE IT WAS GETTING TOO BIG

at the time. As a film fan, Gilbert admits that he would have loved to include better animation and a full speech track in *Maniac Mansion* but these things were just not possible on the computers of the Eighties. It would be another six years before technology caught up with his ambition and, appropriately enough, the first game to include those desired elements would be *Maniac Mansion*'s sequel, *Day Of The Tentacle*.

By the early-Nineties, Lucasfilm Games had become LucasArts and had evolved into a formidable videogame powerhouse. Adventure games were its forte: *Zak McKraken & The Alien Mindbenders*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Loom* had all been hugely successful games for the company. That success inevitably required LucasArts to produce sequels to its most popular games, and if you look at *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* and *Indiana Jones & The Fate Of Atlantis*, *Maniac Mansion* was a natural choice to receive a follow-up.

By 1992, Gilbert had left LucasArts to found his own company, Humongous Entertainment, although he was involved in the planning and writing of *Day Of The Tentacle*. For the design and programming of the sequel, the responsibility fell to two new recruits. Dave Grossman (*Sam & Max Season 1*) and Tim Schafer (*Grim Fandango*) had assisted Gilbert in the development of the first two *Monkey Island* games and it was thought that the pair were now ready to undertake their own project. "We stuck together in a kind of checks-and-balances duo to lessen the risk for the company," reveals Grossman, "and it was suggested that a new game based on *Maniac Mansion* might be a good application of our particular comedy sensibilities. We both thought that sounded great and away we went."

As a sequel, *Day Of The Tentacle* naturally included some of the same characters as *Maniac Mansion* although not all of them made it. "We kept the ones we thought were the most fun," says Grossman. "The entire Edison family were essential and we also liked Bernard for his unqualified nerdiness. We had originally intended to keep Razor as well, but she didn't make the final cut." CONTINUED >.



We asked Grossman if there were any puzzles too complicated to include in *Day Of The Tentacle*'s final design. " No actually. Complicated was not a quality that bothered us on *Tentacle*."



What They Said...



"Although the graphics and sound don't push back any barriers, they work together perfectly to create a believable, almost film-like atmosphere. *Maniac Mansion* definitely rates as a 'must buy' – it's just a shame that it's only available on disk."

Zzap64! issue 32





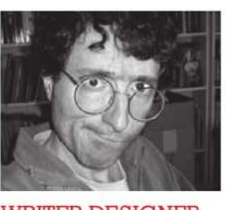


For Dave Grossman, the writing was one of the most fulfilling parts of development.



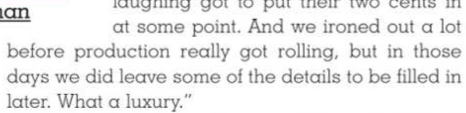
The characters and plot were the only element of *Maniac Mansion* that made the leap to *Day Of The Tentacle*, however. The selectable character roster was thrown out, as were the multiple story branches. Instead, Grossman and Schafer went with an innovative time-travel idea that would see the main characters inhabit three different time periods and solve puzzles by manipulating items in one time zone in order to affect the other. "My weakening memory can't be absolutely certain," says Grossman, "but I think the time-travel idea was something that Ron Gilbert suggested. Ron and Gary were still around for the early design sessions. We did toss around a few other possibilities, but that one seemed the most interesting."

With such an ambitious idea at its core, it's clear why *Maniac Mansion*'s selectable character system was dropped, though we have to wonder whether it was ever intended to be a part of *Tentacle* in the first place. "The initial design called for you to be able to do that, and included six player characters instead of three," answers Grossman. "We ultimately decided that the game was plenty complicated already, and the character selection was going to cost us a ton to implement – production values had progressed considerably from the days of the first *Maniac Mansion* – while adding very little in terms of actual gameplay. It was the first thing we cut, and thank goodness we did or we'd still be building the game today."



WRITER DESIGNER
Dave Grossman

The time-travel premise understandably makes *Tentacle* one of the most complicated videogames of its type. We imagine that designing the puzzles and incorporating them into the story must have been a logistical nightmare. "You'd be right about that," Grossman responds, "although, at the time it seemed more like a crazy fever-dream than a nightmare. It was certainly a lot to keep in your head, and it took months to iron out all the details. It was fun to think about, though. We tended to design by brainstorm, starting from the problem and working toward the solution, just like you do when you play the finished product. Tim and I were at the core, directing the process, but the sessions also included plenty of other people at various times. Pretty much anyone who was on the development team or who happened to be walking by the conference room and heard us laughing got to put their two cents in at some point. And we ironed out a lot before production really got rolling, but in those days we did leave some of the details to be filled in later. What a luxury."



Organising the puzzles wasn't the only difficult part of *Day Of The Tentacle*'s design. The historical aspect of the game's story, which involved interacting with America's founding fathers and poking fun at famous legends from the period, required a certain amount of accuracy from the writing. "It may surprise you to learn that there actually was a small amount of genuine research done, mainly by me," reveals Grossman, "though typically if history



Point-and-click arguably killed off the text adventure, but Gilbert doesn't seem to mind. "I was never a big text adventure player," he admits. "Plus, progress happens. The FPS killed off adventure games, now MMOs are killing off everything else.

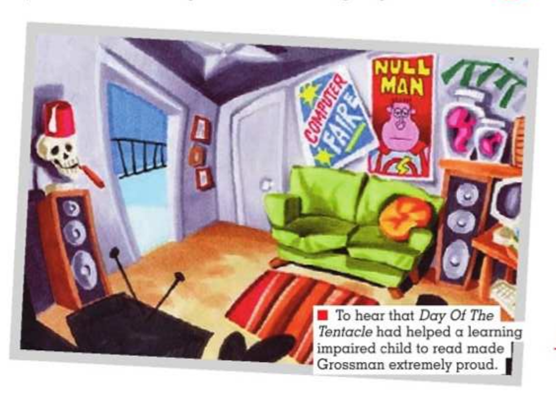
did not agree with what was convenient for the game's design, we ignored it and did whatever we wanted. Historical accuracy was not our primary concern. The internet was not quite as full in the early-Nineties as it is now; so much of the research was done by going to the library, or by calling the library on the phone. Reference librarians are nice people, you should ring one up sometime and say hello."

The list of difficulties goes on, particularly in the script writing, although we're surprised to find that making *Day Of The Tentacle* funny was the least troublesome part of this process. "I think comedy is easy, at least comparatively, and it's drama that's more demanding," Grossman explains. "Comedy is very forgiving, it lets you colour outside the lines. I'm aware that it's a personality thing and that some people feel exactly the opposite way, but I don't think any of them were working on *Day Of The Tentacle* in any capacity. Writing all of the dialogue was something that seemed particularly difficult to do while other people were in the office," he continues. "A lot of it got done after hours when it was quiet. Oddly, 15 years later I'm still facing the same challenges. Maybe it's me…"

As the first LucasArts adventure to include a full 'talkie' soundtrack, *Day Of The Tentacle* moved the genre forward just as much as *Maniac Mansion* had and further propelled the series toward Gilbert's dream of the 'interactive movie'. In comparison to the coding of SCUMM and the writing of *Tentacle*'s script however, incorporating voice work for the first time was a relatively painless procedure. "Our voice director, Tamlynn Barra, had us describe how we imagined the characters sounding, then got a lot of audition tapes (and yes, this was long enough ago that they were actual cassette tapes and not digital files), weeded through them a bit, and let me and Tim listen to the cream of the crop. I remember Denny Delk and Nick Jameson did about five voices each for the game, they were quite versatile. Tim's sister, Ginny, also appears as Nurse Edna, and I remember he abstained from voting on that role to avoid the murky shadow of nepotism. The character of Bernard was quite difficult to cast, nothing we heard quite seemed to work for us, and finally in a fit of inspiration I said that he should sound something like the character Les Nessman from *WKRP In Cincinnati*. Tamlynn surprised us by saying she knew the agent who represented the actor who played that part. Shortly thereafter we got Richard Sanders, and he was awesome in the role."

To define a genre once is a landmark achievement but to better that formula with each similar new game and perfect it with the sequel is almost unheard of. Everyone involved with the production of either *Maniac Mansion* or *Day Of The Tentacle* should be eternally proud for that very reason but one person in particular has a very different, much more touching reason to be proud. "The most rewarding moment," beams Grossman, "probably of my entire career, came after the game was finished. I was at a convention and someone on an elevator told me that her learning-disabled son had finally learned to read by playing *Day Of The Tentacle*. Something about having the dialogue both spoken and subtitled, coupled with it being engaging enough for him to pay attention and watch the lines over and over again did the trick. I believe that games are good for people for a number of reasons, but hearing that story made me feel like I'd accomplished something important."

TENTACLE PROPELLED THE SERIES TOWARD GILBERT'S DREAM OF INTERACTIVE MOVIES

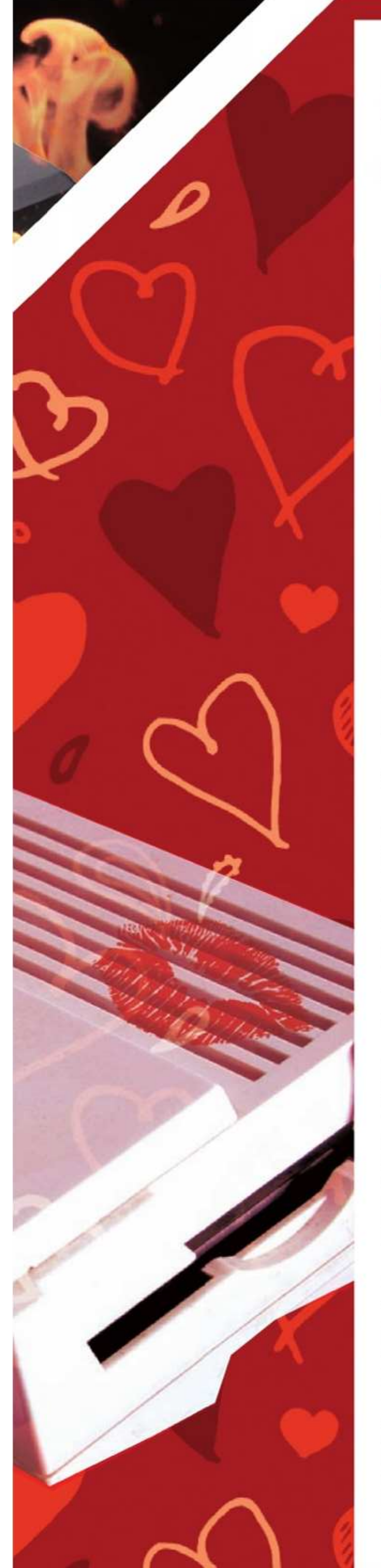


To hear that *Day Of The Tentacle* had helped a learning impaired child to read made Grossman extremely proud.



A Mansion Within A Mansion

AS WELL AS being a great retro game in its own right, *Day Of The Tentacle* also happens to be one of the first titles to include another classic game hidden within itself. By using a computer in one of the rooms of Dr Fred's mansion it was possible to play the original game in all its 8-bit glory. Dave Grossman explains how the unusual inclusion came about. "One of the artists – I think it was Lela Dowling – had done an elaborate full-screen animation of the founding fathers leaping through a window and crashing to the ground. It wasn't playing properly for some reason and what I eventually figured out was that we had exceeded a limitation of the SCUMM system. It couldn't handle an animation file larger than 64K. Ron hadn't quite left to start Humongous yet and when we mentioned this to him he noted, in a 'my, how times change' sort of way, that the original *Maniac Mansion* was designed to fit into the memory of a Commodore 64: the whole thing was smaller than 64K. It was curiously exciting to hear that a single animation for *Day Of The Tentacle* exceeded the disk size of the entire original game and we immediately fixated on the idea that we had to include *Maniac Mansion* somehow.



CONSOLE YOURSELF

They should have been winners, but consoles based on popular home computers have all crashed and burned. games™ finds out why…

BEHOLD THE SHINY sheriffs of console town. Three solid hunks of plastic that were to redefine gaming. Three studiously engineered man-machines that the manufacturers hoped would have addiction turned up to unfathomable levels. These were the cracking computer cakes that simply could not fail, and the moneymen behind them already had their abacuses on standby ready to count the copious number of beans that were about to head their way. Then, one by one, they fell by the wayside, each a victim of sheer apathy. 'Why, oh why, did this happen?' wailed Amstrad and Commodore. 'They were consoles based on some of the most popular home computers of all time…'

You can never guarantee the success of a console. Some fine brains have worked on producing gaming greats that were so good the world's governments of their day should have passed laws making them compulsory in every home in the land. But instead of causing a stampede to Argos – sleep easy, Dreamcast – they were either left in the shops or shoved on top of the wardrobe. Sega, Nintendo, Sony… they've all seen killer consoles wither on the vine.

Then there are the machines that should, in concept at least, have done well. These are the ones that were based on home computers: the GX4000s, Commodore 64 GSs and Amiga CD32s of this digital world. But, for one reason or another, consolising a home computer has always – repeat always – failed. And the biggest losers in this respect have been Amstrad and Commodore, the latter feeling the pain not once but twice.

"It was a matter of raw performance and functionality," says Dave Needle, a member of the original Amiga design team. "A game console needs gigantic raw graphics performance whereas a home computer does not. That was where the mistakes came. System designers, including me, got lost in the excitement of having computer capability in a game console. We got sidetracked with things like adding CD players or special I/O devices. In the process, we wandered away from the basics of gameplay and entertainment."



ROLAND PERRY
Amstrad

The GX4000 was based on the Amstrad CPC range of computers, including the most popular, the 464. The C64 GS was essentially a Commodore 64 without a keyboard, and the CD32 was similar to the Amiga 1200 and was based on Commodore's Advanced Graphics Architecture chipset. Each of these machines suffered disappointing sales and was canned early in its life cycle. Not enough games were released for them and they had the anticipated problem of the titles – which were already available on the home computers – being dumped on the new consoles, often without sufficient tweaking.

That was a major mistake. The strength of a console lies in its games, and people are looking for quality and at the number of titles available. For a machine to be truly successful it also either has to be technically out of this world or it needs to produce something else that catches the attention. So you can have a mind-blowing PlayStation 3 with the games to match, or you can have a Nintendo Wii – a machine that is not incredibly well endowed but has the huge attraction of the Remote. If you also have top-quality titles, then your chances of winning become greater.

FOR A MACHINE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IT HAS TO BE TECHNICALLY OUT OF THIS WORLD

WHEN THE GX4000, C64 GS and the CD32 arrived, however, they had neither the technical superiority of their peers nor the awesome games and 'gimmicks'. Much of that was because consoles were released toward the end of their respective home computer's life. The Commodore 64 GS was released in 1990 but was based on technology dating back to 1982. And although Amstrad, for instance, had made efforts to revamp its CPC range by adding cartridge capability and CONTINUED >.

THE KILLER APPS

The consolised computers may have been commercial failures but they still had the occasional decent game. Here's games™'s pick of the best

NAME: **BURNIN' RUBBER**
FORMAT: **GX4000**

THIS GAME came bundled with the GX4000 and wowed punters throughout the land with its impressive graphics and brilliant crash scenes. This all played a part in setting *Burnin' Rubber* apart from other 8-bit driving games. The aim was to keep going without running out of time. Progress on the road was demonstrated by the sky changing colour from day to night and it was actually engaging fun – unusual for bundled games at the time.



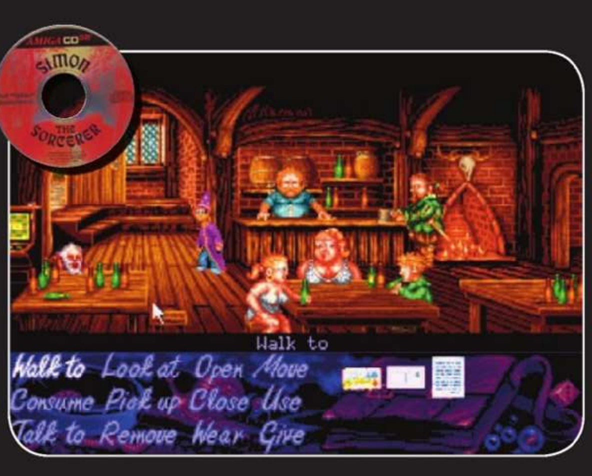
NAME: **ROBOCOP 2**
FORMAT: **COMMODORE 64 GS**

EASILY ONE of Ocean's best games, *Robocop* blended great graphics, superb sound and gripping gameplay into a classic 2D platform game that saw you shooting at enemies and avoiding all manner of pitfalls (such as holes). The one gripe was that dying meant you had to go right back to the start, but if many other games of this quality had been released for the home computer-based consoles, this entire article may have been very different.



NAME: **SIMON THE SORCERER**
FORMAT: **AMIGA CD32**

GENUINELY EXCLUSIVE CD32 games are few and far between and, even then, they're rarely that great. The best the machine has to offer, however, is expanded ports of existing Amiga titles with enhancements brought about by the CD-ROM technology. *Simon The Sorcerer* is perhaps the best of these. It's a brilliant point-and-click adventure made even better by the inclusion of a highly professional voice track not found on the floppy version.



Bally Astrocade



EVEN TODAY there appears to be a desire to blur the distinction between computers and consoles. Critics said Xbox was little more than a PC in a fresh box and now we see keyboards being made available for Wii. But those who have had experience of such crossovers, including Amiga, Lynx and 3DO creator Dave Needle, say that the fine line should not be crossed. "The new consoles have stepped up their processing power to try to outdo the PCs," he says. "But an Xbox with a keyboard will never be a substitute for a PC."

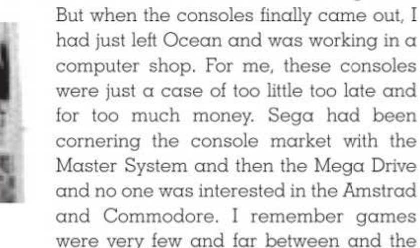
Needle almost had an early brush with converting a computer into a console. In 1977, Bally Technologies created a game console that began life as the Home Library Computer but eventually became the Astrocade. It was a videogame console and simple computer and a few months after it was released, there were plans for a computer add-on that would have incorporated 16K of extra memory, a printer/modem serial port, a BASIC programming language, two tape ports, an expansion port for a disk drive and a keyboard.

There were production problems, and when the idea surfaced again it was envisioned having 32K memory and CP/M compatibility. More problems ensued, and to this day it's thought that the keyboard went unreleased.

Needle claims he approached Bally with the intention of turning the game console into a fully fledged home computer. "I contacted the firm to see what I might do to achieve such a product but they turned down the offer," he explains. "Now I agree that it was correct to turn it down. While I certainly could have made the product, it would not have enjoyed financial success."

giving it built-in hardware sprites, smooth hardware scrolling, a palette of 4,096 colours – 32 of which could be displayed on screen at once – it was too little too late. It didn't help that most of the games on these consoles were little more than ports from the home computer with a huge price tag. Some games were enhanced but they began to fall by the wayside in favour of cheap cash-ins.

"Perhaps the manufacturing cost and therefore the sale cost of the cartridges were too high," admits Roland Perry, Amstrad group technical manager when GX4000 launched in 1990. "People could buy similar games on floppy disk for home computer versions. A look at the price lists of games back then confirms this. Cartridges were, with the benefit of hindsight, too expensive."



MARK JONES
Ocean

Nevertheless, both Amstrad and Commodore had made steps to ensure their machines had game developers behind them. Manchester-based Ocean Software became an important backer of the GX4000 and C64 GS and produced the majority of games, but other publishers that were involved with the two machines included Gremlin, Titus, Loricel, Domark and System 3.

TO ENCOURAGE THEM to produce games, and in direct contrast to the practices of Sega and Nintendo, Amstrad and Commodore didn't dictate who could and could not produce games for the consoles. In the case of Amstrad, the only stipulation was that the packaging had to follow a preset format. Indeed, at the launch of the GX4000 Sir Alan Sugar said: "We don't just see this as Amstrad fighting Nintendo and Sega, we see this as Amstrad, together with companies such as Ocean and others who want to make money and who do not want to be dictated to, fighting against these people."

Having Ocean on board was crucial for both Amstrad and Commodore. The publisher was one of Britain's biggest, and although it was often criticised for its generic licensed titles, it still knocked out some of the most popular games at the time. *Robocop 2*, for instance, became an essential title for GX4000 and C64 GS and really showed off the machines' capabilities. But it wasn't enough, as Mark Jones who worked at Ocean at the time the GX4000 and C64GS were being worked on recalls. "There was a lot of excitement at the time," he says. "I remember there was an Amstrad console/Ocean magazine the company had produced that had information on all the new games. But when the consoles finally came out, I had just left Ocean and was working in a computer shop. For me, these consoles were just a case of too little too late and for too much money. Sega had been cornering the console market with the Master System and then the Mega Drive and no one was interested in the Amstrad and Commodore. I remember games were very few and far between and the ones we did have sat on the shelves for ages. The boxes got battered and in the end we couldn't give them away."

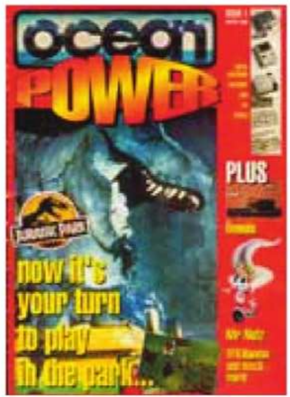
Sure enough, within eight months the GX4000 was being flogged in independent stores for as little as £30 and the big chains had completely given up on it. *Amstrad Action* even ran a contest asking readers to find the cheapest GX4000 in Britain.

IN 1990, WHO WOULD BUY A CONSOLE BASED ON 1982 COMPUTING ARCHITECTURE?

C64 GS fared little better. The problem was that Commodore 64 owners – and there were many – were more than satisfied with their home computers. If they were going to snap up a console, they would want something more advanced than a machine based on something they already had. While the GX4000 had better technology than the CPC, the C64 GS was basically a Commodore 64 without the keyboard. In 1990, who in their right mind would buy a console based on 1982 computing architecture that performed fewer functions than the original computer?

Quite simply, the manufacturer waited too long to take the plunge, but the reason why CONTINUED >.

■ Ironically for a failed console, the GX4000 was one of the most attractive hardware designs of the Nineties.



■ Ocean produced a magazine highlighting the best of the GX4000.



■ As well as GX4000, Amstrad thought it had all bases covered by bringing out the CPC Plus range, including GX4000 capabilities within the CPC computer.

THE ATARI XEGS

What's Atari Playing At?

ATARI WAS ANOTHER company to try to blur the console-computer lines. It took an Atari 65XE 8-bit computer and worked on its aesthetics, coming out with a machine that looked more like a game console. It was able to play around a decade's worth of discs and cartridges so Atari thought it was on to a winner. It came with the game *Missile Command* built in. The machine could be used as a standalone console and it came complete with a lightgun, *Bug Hunt* and an Atari 2600 joystick. By plugging in the optional keyboard it was on its way to becoming a full computer. But just like the GX4000, C64GS and Amiga CD32 it flopped.

is clear. In the Eighties the computer was king. Consoles only began to emerge as a force in the late-Eighties and early-Nineties and that is what caught the attention of Amstrad and Commodore. But by deciding to capitalise on the success of their existing brands and technology, they were trying to nudge their way into the console market on reputation alone. They believed that people would buy their consoles out of blind loyalty and familiarity and didn't see that people wanted 16-bit and that rival consoles were offering not only more but also something new.

Cliff Lawson, who was a member of the team behind the GX4000, said: "By the time we launched the new machines, computers like the Acorn Archimedes and Atari ST were showing what 16-bit CPUs could achieve. And we were still stuck in the 8-bit world. Admittedly, the GX4000 had hardware assistance but the ST and Archimedes had powerful sound and graphic support chips too."



Would a console based on a computer work today? There aren't as many branded computers around these days of course but PS3 and 360 are essentially consolised PCs. Now all we need is an Apple Mac console to complete the set.

FOR AMSTRAD AND Commodore to make an impact would have meant matching the marketing budgets of Sega and Nintendo. With a bit of spin, they might have been able to achieve success, but Sega and Nintendo had the cash to splash. Amstrad and Commodore didn't. It meant the Japanese companies were able to entice gamers away from both the home computers and their spun-off consoles by bombarding gamers with cool, eye-catching advertising, and word of mouth in the playgrounds spread. Amstrad and Commodore could never hope to beat the likes of Mega Drive.

SEGA AND NINTENDO HAD THE CASH TO SPLASH. AMSTRAD AND COMMODORE DIDN'T

"If you have millions of pounds and can throw the odd few thousand here or there to various software companies to persuade them to target software for your console you will succeed," explains Lawson. "But the risk is that you run the entire console business at a multi-million pound loss – hugely subsidising it for the first couple of years until it gains a foothold."



CLIFF LAWSON
Amstrad

While Amstrad decided to cash in its chips and pull out of the home computer and console market, Commodore stuck at it and, in 1993, launched CD32, a machine based around the architecture of the A1200. What's more, it did a better job of it this time around with the CD32 beating Sega's Mega CD and the Philips CDi. But that didn't stop it from failing. It may well have been the first 32-bit console to hit Europe and North America but problems with the supply of components and the looming bankruptcy of Commodore International contributed to its downfall.

"The videogame industry is the entertainment industry. The computer industry is not," says Needle, summing up the situation. "We in the computer industry had a hard time believing that

Computers And Consoles By Numbers

Amiga 1200 – **1,000,000 sales**

CD32 – **100,000 made (not necessarily sold)**

Commodore 64 – **30,000,000 sales**

Commodore 64 GS – **20,000 sales (80,000 produced)**

Amstrad CPC – **2,500,000 sales**

GX4000 – **15,000 sales**



COMPUTER *AND* CONSOLE

THROUGHOUT THIS retro article, we have looked at whether consoles can become computers or vice versa. What's interesting is the British-made PC-Mega Drive hybrid that combined a Sega Mega Drive and a regular 386SX PC, running at 25MHz with a 40MB hard drive and 1MB of RAM.

The machine was made by Amstrad and was similar in concept to the Teradrive released in Japan which had a Mega Drive in a 80286 PC.

The Mega Drive was integrated into the Amstrad computer as a 16-bit ISA card and was accessed by a switch at the front of the computer. There was also a slot at the front of the machine into which cartridges could be inserted and all Mega Drive games – even those on Mega CD – could be used.

The PC also had stereo sound as well as a headhone socket, something that was removed from Mega Drive II.

And yet the machine cost a small fortune – £599+VAT – and so priced itself out of the range of the average console fan. A 2MB 486SLC Mega Plus cost £799+VAT, and for an extra £100 buyers could get a 130MB hard drive and 4MB of RAM. Yet it was all still too expensive for gamers at the time and ultimately failed.



our wonderful computers would not have sufficient personal attraction to overcome their failings as a game console."

Needle knows a thing or two about computers and videogame consoles. He not only had a hand in making the Amiga the great machine that it was, he also went on to mastermind the Atari Lynx and the 3DO. While neither of these did as well as they should have, The 3DO Company did at least try to set a console standard and, with its rave reviews, perhaps should have made greater headway in the fifth-generation console market. Far from criticising Commodore's CD32, he believes the problems that it encountered were the same as many console makers were facing: they just couldn't let go of their home computer roots and produce something specifically for games.

■■■ **"ONE OF THE GOOD** things about CD32 was that it could be turned into a computer by adding a keyboard, drive and mouse," Needle explains. "But that's where other problems began – those in the game industry had a hard time believing that the addition of a printer port was not enough to make consoles into valid computers. I just don't think the two cross over very well."

Needle says engineers and management were unable to overcome their "emotional denial" about the lack of value of the innards of the original machines. "The creators of the underlying technology, whether hardware graphics engines or software operating systems, felt that the end consumer would care about their invention and that it would cause them to buy a system that would otherwise be too slow or too expensive," he says. "While there are tens of thousands of such end consumers – the early adopters – there are not millions. In the end, no one cared what was inside the box. No one cared how the OS worked. No one cared how polygons turned into bullets. The games just needed to be fun. So, while it was okay to use an Amiga graphics engine in a game console, it was not okay to believe that the limitations of that 'older' architecture would be ignored by the mass consumer. It's unlikely that a single console offering a complete set of both gaming and computing functionality can succeed financially but it sure was fun trying."



PLUG-AND-PLAY THE C64 JOYSTICK CONSOLE

Commodore may have died over ten years ago but C64 is still going strong. Albeit in reduced form

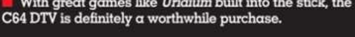
COMMODORE 64 REMAINS a popular machine and although C64 GS didn't fare too well, the second, cut-down stab at creating a console was a roaring success.

Called the C64 D2TV, it squeezed the entire machine onto just one microchip which was then fitted into a Competition Pro-style plug-and-play joystick containing 30 games including old favourites such as Epyx's *Winter Games*, *California Games*, *Paradroid*, *Uridium*, *Nebulus* and *Speedball*.

At the time of its release in 2005, Darren Melbourne, the creative director of Ironstone Partners, said: "This will only be the first of many C64-related hardware projects and enthusiasts of the Commodore 64 should keep one eye open for what the future will bring."

We're still waiting for the next stage, but in the meantime, many enthusiasts have turned their D2TV into fully operating C64s complete with keyboards and disk drives. Pointless perhaps but there's no doubting the passion and dedication of a C64 fan.





■ With great games like *Uridium* built into the stick, the C64 DTV is definitely a worthwhile purchase.



■ C64 emulation was too awkward and fiddly for some, so C64 DTV is the perfect way to replay those classics.



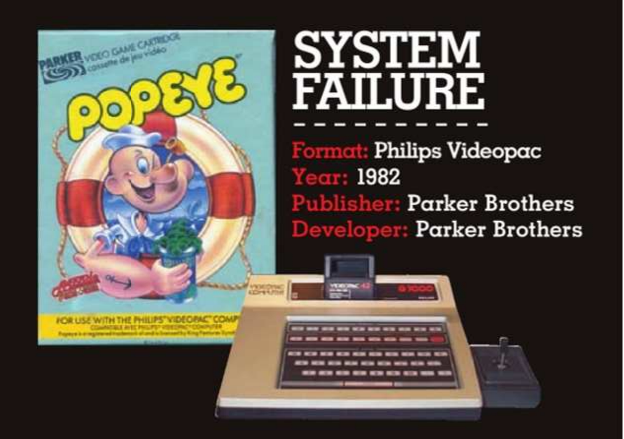
■ Commodore and its biggest supporters did an admirable job of promoting the C64 GS but the sad truth was that cartridges were just far too expensive in comparison to cassette tapes, and offered little to justify the extra cost. The console was destined for failure all along.





CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing console ports under the spotlight



SYSTEM FAILURE

Format: Philips Videopac
Year: 1982
Publisher: Parker Brothers
Developer: Parker Brothers

POPEYE

THE HYPE



■ HYPE MAY WELL be the wrong word to describe *Popeye*. The 27-year-old Nintendo coin-op is far from well remembered and definitely didn't set the world alight to the same degree as its contemporaries. But it was very, very good. Designed by Shigeru Miyamoto, *Popeye* has superficial similarities to *Donkey Kong* but actually has more in common with *Pac-Man*. Instead of munching pills you collect love hearts, and instead of turning the tables with a power pellet you do so with spinach. The best things about the game, however, were context-sensitive actions, like the bucket on the first level that can be dropped on Bluto's head, and the seesaw on Level 2 that lets you bounce from the bottom to the top of the screen.

THE WARNING SIGNS

You don't really need a clearer warning sign than this. Just look at those terrible visuals!

You know a game must be light on selling points when most of the box is just the description in several different languages.





In this game, you're Popeye! And your goal is to catch all of Olive Oyl's hearts before they hit the water and sink – or before Brutus knocks you overboard. For each 100 points you score, you'll advance to the next – and more difficult – round. Good luck!

Dans ce jeu, POPEYE, c'est vous! Et votre but est d'attraper tous les coeurs d'Olive Oyl avant qu'ils ne tombent à l'eau et coulent – ou avant que Brutus ne vous renverse. Chaque fois que vous marquez 100 points, vous avancez jusqu'au prochain tour qui est plus difficile. Bonne chance!

In diesem Spiel sind Sie POPEYE! Ihr Ziel ist es, alle Herzen von Olivia aufzufangen, bevor sie im Wasser versinken. Dabei müssen Sie Brutus und seinen Flaschen aus dem Weg gehen, um nicht über Bord geworfen zu werden. Jedesmal wenn Sie 100 Punkte gesammelt haben, geht es weiter zur nächsten – und schwierigeren Runde.

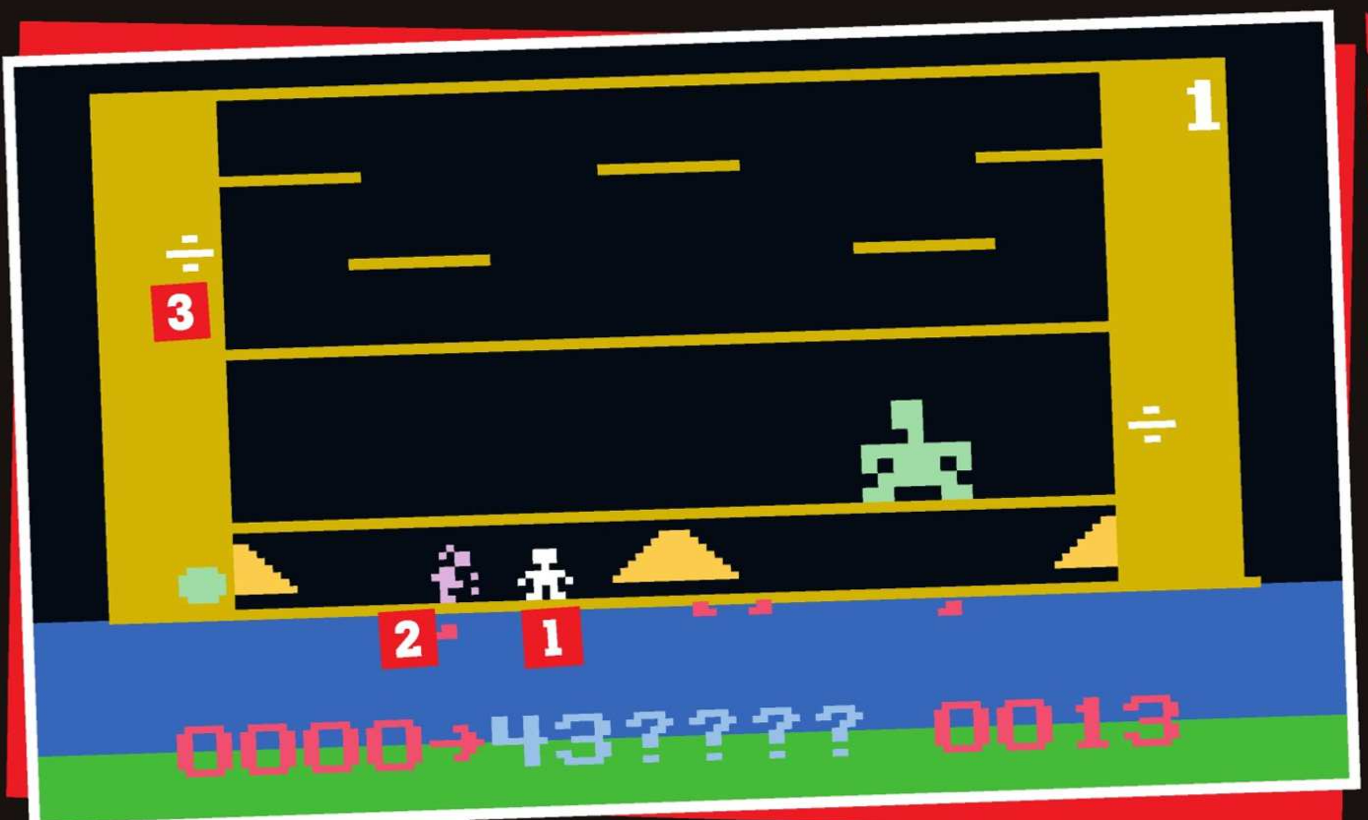
In questo gioco vi trovate nei panni di POPEYE! Il vostro intento è di afferrare tutti i cuori di Olive Oyl prima che finiscano in acqua ed affondino, o prima che Brutus vi faccia cadere in acqua. Per ogni 100 punti che segnerete passerete al giro successivo, che sarà più difficile.

En este juego, ¡usted es POPEYE! Y su meta es recoger todos los corazones de Olivia antes de que caigan al mar y se hundan – o antes de que Brutus lo tire por la borda. Por cada 100 puntos obtenidos, avanzará a la siguiente vuelta, que será aún más difícil, ¡Buena suerte!

In dit spel ben je POPEYE! En je legt je erop toe alle hartjes van Olijfje te winnen voordat ze in het water vallen en zinken – of voordat Brutus je overboord slaat. Voor iedere 100 punten die je scoort ga je naar de volgende ronde – en die is een stuk moeilijker. Sukses!

A video game cartridge from  For the PHILIPS VIDEOPAC Computer

It's a good thing the game tells you who the main playable character is, because we honestly can't tell from the screenshots.



THE REALITY

NINTENDO'S POPEYE COIN-OP isn't just a good score-attack arcade game; it's also one of the best licensed games of the early Eighties. The bold visuals, the expressive animation and sense of fun all help reinforce the feeling that you're playing a cartoon come to life – which makes *Popeye*'s visuals almost of equal importance to the gameplay experience. Needless to say, the Philips Videopac doesn't come anywhere close to replicating the look of the original, but it's quite shocking just how much the game's blocky levels and blockier characters fail to capture the distinctive look and charm of the licence. Anyone buying this version of the game and expecting an authentic *Popeye* arcade game experience at the time of release must have been sorely disappointed.

1 This generic-looking stick-man is meant to be Popeye. Can you believe that? His arms don't even enlarge when he eats spinach – he just turns red! Terrible. He really could be any character at all and probably was used in other Videopac games.

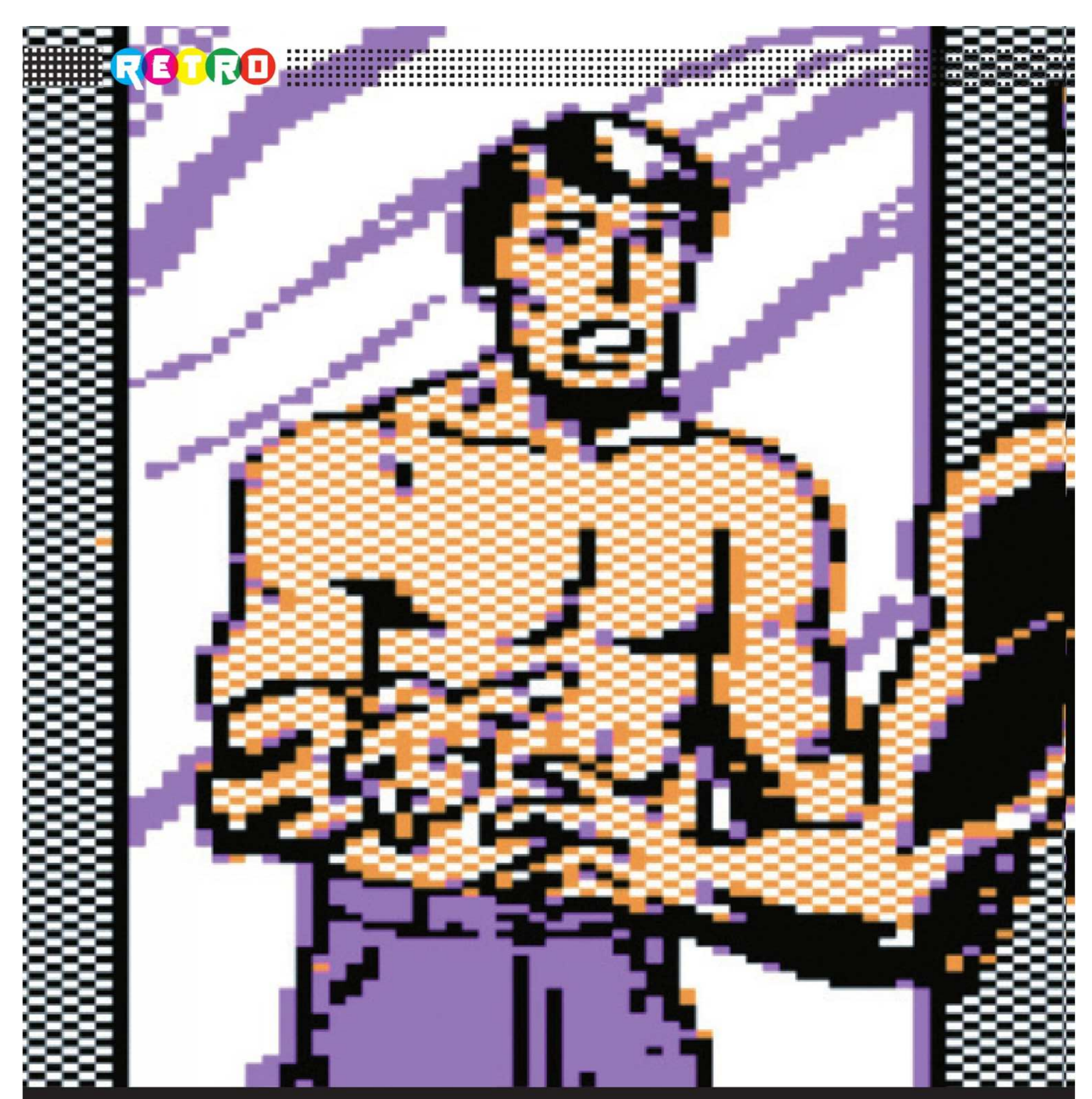
2 This is Olive Oyl. The sprite doesn't look anything like her, granted, but at least we can see that she is female. What she's doing here is anyone's guess, though. She could be crying, but it actually looks more like she's being sick on the floor.

3 These division signs don't appear in the original game, nor any other conversion, for that matter. They're basically elevators, even if they don't look it. Quite why the developer couldn't put working stairs in, like the original game, we don't know.

What You Should Have Played It On



Though there are actually lots of decent *Popeye* conversions, special mention has to go to the NES edition. The only home port to be made by Nintendo, the NES version of *Popeye* actually improves on the coin-op, with more responsive controls and better handling on the tricky stairs. Well done, Nintendo!



His name may not have the star power of SHIGERU MIYAMOTO or NOLAN BUSHNELL, but for fans of text adventures, the name SCOTT ADAMS is equally important. As the man who introduced interactive fiction to the home computer market, ADAMS lay the groundwork for a lineage of story games that's still alive and kicking today.

<-->

OK.

GREAT SCOTT

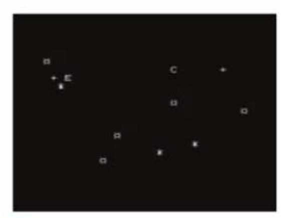


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
All imagery relating to the IMP-16 computer and Scott's *Space Wars* supplied by Richard Adams at exoticsciences.com
All box art and advert scans supplied by Ye Olde Infocomme Shoppe and VG Museum

IN THE DAYS before Sierra and LucasArts held court over the adventure genre, when home computers were scarce and *Zork* could only be played on a mainframe, Scott Adams was one of the pioneers of a fledgling videogame industry. He's best known for founding Adventure International in 1978 – the first company to sell adventure games – and going on to author nearly 20 interactive fiction titles over the next seven years. But his introduction to development came a decade earlier, when his Florida high school acquired a computer terminal in the late Sixties.

"I was instantly hooked," Adams recalls. "I got special permission to come to school before it opened and the janitor would let me in. I would stay after school until nine or ten in the evening and all my free time went to teaching myself programming." Adams had never taken a programming class and had only the guidance of the University of Miami's manual for the APL-360 computer language. "My first major program was a tic-tac-toe program that never lost. It took me at least a month or more to perfect."

"I always thought of myself as a programmer that loved to play games and make them if there weren't any to be played," Adams describes himself. That was the situation CONTINUED >.



Scott's first game. The letter E represents the Starship Enterprise, while C is an enemy ship. The ships could be moved and weapons fired using the keyboard.





The code for Scott's 1975 space shooter spanned 14 hand-written pages.

in 1975, while Adams was attending the Florida Institute of Technology with his two younger brothers. At the time, playing a videogame meant heading to the pub with a pocketful of change or tapping into a corporate mainframe after hours. Home computers were unheard of, so Adams' brothers built their own.

"My brother Richard was always fascinated with hardware," Adams explains. "He purchased the chipsets for the computer and designed his own circuit boards. My brother Eric wrote a simple loader to allow hex codes to be entered into the system via TV typewriter." The result may well have been the first 16-bit home computer, and the simple space shooter Scott created for it the first home computer game.

"I wrote the game in assembler, then hand-assembled it into machine language and painstakingly entered it into the machine." Dubbed *Scott's Space Wars*, the game used letters, asterisks, and other characters to depict ships and planets on screen.

After college, Adams worked as a space object identification analyst at an Air Force radar station on Antigua. The radar was taken down at night, giving Adams an opportunity to tinker with the mainframe. "In my spare time, I adapted a Fortran *Star Trek* game to run on the mainframes," he recalls. "The game was designed to be played on a teletype machine, but I changed it to run on the video monitors that the radar systems used." Adams believes this may have been the first game with graphics to run on a mainframe. He then moved into the private sector with a programming job at telecommunications company Stromberg-Carlson, where he encountered a little game called *Colossal Cave Adventure*.



"IN MY SPARE TIME, I ADAPTED A STAR TREK GAME TO RUN ON THE AIR FORCE MAINFRAMES"

DESIGNED BY PROGRAMMER and spelunking enthusiast Will Crowther, *Colossal Cave Adventure* is the granddaddy of adventure games. Using a text parser that accepts two-word commands, the player must travel through a series of caves based on the Mammoth caves in Kentucky, solve puzzles, and acquire treasures. "It felt more like an open-ended sandbox than a game at times," Adams recalls of his early experience playing *Colossal Cave Adventure* on the Stromberg-Carlson mainframe. "It was just a great deal of fun to play and solve."

By this time computers were slowly infiltrating the home, and Adams had purchased a Tandy TRS-80 for his personal use. While a few games were available for the platform, none provided a storytelling experience like *Colossal Cave*'s, and Adams saw an opportunity to introduce interactive fiction to the average Joe. He developed an engine that would run a text parser game using only 16K of memory as opposed to the 300K needed by *Colossal Cave*, and created his first commercial game for the TRS-80: *Adventureland*. Released in 1978 by Adams' newly formed company, Adventure International, this was the first adventure game playable on a home computer.

Like *Colossal Cave*, *Adventureland* was primarily a treasure hunt. The player's objective was to recover valuable items scattered across a world of hodgepodge fantasy elements that included a sleeping dragon, the devil, and legendary logger Paul Bunyan. Adams set the scene through simple descriptions: "I'm in a forest. Visible items are: Trees." The parser asked "WHAT SHALL I DO?" and the player directed it by typing two-word commands – a verb followed by a noun – such as 'CLIMB TREE', 'THROW AXE' or 'EAT MUD'. If you entered a combination the game wasn't expecting, the parser quipped: "Huh? I don't think so!"

Home computers' limited system memory meant that Adams had to significantly restrict the text parser's vocabulary, often to the player's frustration. Although *Adventureland* had a vocabulary of about 120 words, the parser only recognised the first three letters





YOUR ADVENTURE AWAITS…

■ WHEN THEY WERE first released, Adams opened each of his text adventures with a plea not to pirate the game and rob his company of well-deserved cash. Today, he makes the games freely available from his website in web-based and Windows-friendly formats (visit www.msadams.com for download links). Those who prefer the old-school experience can find ROMs and emulators online to play *Adventureland*, *Pirate Adventure*, *Ghost Town*, and the rest in all their 8-bit glory.



of each word. "This caused some problems with words that had three letters the same but were totally different," Adams recalls. "There was this bear on a ledge that people needed to get past. I wanted them to shout at the bear and put in synonyms for shout, scream, yell. I got an interesting letter from a player who was so frustrated with the bear he typed in 'SCREW BEAR' [and the] game replied 'Bear is so startled that he fell off the ledge!'"

■■■ *ADVENTURELAND* WAS FIRST marketed through advertisements in computing magazines such as *Byte*, with Adams duplicating the cassettes himself and fulfilling orders through the mail. As word of *Adventureland* spread, Adventure International increased production and started selling into Radio Shack and other retail stores. Adams began churning out a number of successful adventures, releasing new titles such as *Pirate Adventure*, *The Count*, *Mystery Fun House* and *Ghost Town* about twice a year. Distribution expanded across the US's major home computer models, with Adventure International's games available for the Atari 8-bit series, Commodore PET, Texas Instruments TI-99/4A and Apple II by the early Eighties.

Adams' interactive fiction is told in the first-person, with each game set in a new and iconic environment. The player character is almost always unidentified and anonymous, and the lack of a defined back story invites players to jump in and assume the protagonist's role, a convention that persisted in later adventure games like Cyan's *Myst* series. When asked who he imagined these anonymous characters to be, and how they got into the situations they were in – standing on a deserted road leading into a haunted ghost town, for example – Adams replies: "I never had a back story in mind. I let people supply their own ideas."

"Every time I added a new game, I tweaked the engine and added new features," Adams says. With each release, the text parser got smarter and its vocabulary increased. The games ramped up in difficulty as well, and hint books became a profitable side business. "Later I came up with the SAGA [Scott Adams Graphic Adventure] engine that used graphics, but was still two words. Then I went to SAGA+ and it allowed full sentence inputs."

Why add graphics when the text-only format was selling well? "It sort of was a step backwards," admits Adams. "Usually the pictures were never as good as [people] imagined themselves. But people wanted them and they sold, so I added them." Several of the original text adventures were re-released with graphics, and *Return To Pirate's Island*, a sequel to one of Adams' first games, was released exclusively for the Texas Instruments system as a text/graphics hybrid. "Getting a full graphic adventure into a TI-99/4A game cartridge was an amazing feat," he points out. "One that I don't think was ever repeated." Unfortunately, it was a feat few players experienced; *Return*



FURTHER READING

The first expansion packs?

■ These days expansion packs are common, but Adams' releases for the TI-99/4A may have been the first example of the model. The *Adventure* cartridge came bundled with one game, *Pirate Adventure*, on a cassette. The other adventures were sold without the cartridge. Why not bundle a cartridge with every game, so players could start with whichever adventure they chose? "It was a matter of costs," Adams says. "The interpreter engine was what was in the cartridge. Thereafter it would be cheaper to sell just a game database on the cassette."

To Pirate's Island shipped just as Texas Instruments was abandoning production of the TI-99/4A, and only a limited number of the cartridges were ever released.

In a few short years, Adventure International had grown from a one-man shop to a thriving company with about a dozen employees, including Adams' then-wife Alexis, who was a general manager. The company branched out from Adams' text adventures to publish business and utility software, as well as other types of games – some notable examples are Russ Wetmore's *Preppie* and *Preppie II*, and the *Galactic Saga* trilogy created by Doug Carlston, who went on to form Brøderbund. The UK-based Adventure Soft, which later rose to fame in adventure gaming circles with the *Simon The Sorcerer* series, set up shop in Birmingham to port Adventure International's games to British hardware, and also created its own games using Adams' engine.

In 1984, Adventure International celebrated its continued success by securing two high-profile licensing deals: *The Adventures Of Buckaroo Banzai Across The 8th Dimension*, based on the 20th Century Fox movie of the same name, and the *Questprobe* series, in partnership with Marvel Comics. "We were contacted by Joe Calamari, the vice president of Marvel at the time," Adams explains. "He wanted to see the characters on computers and thought [Adventure International was] the best route to do it." The *Questprobe* series was planned for 12 instalments, each featuring a different Marvel favourite as the protagonist.

Until this point Adams had been calling the shots for Adventure International's games, but for the *Questprobe* titles he had to stay within Marvel's guidelines. "I read the Marvel Universe comics – it was before they were about to publish them [for] the first time – and had a subscription to every single comic Marvel made, and I submersed myself in them." Adams recalls working with Marvel as a fairly straightforward process: "I had full freedom, as long as I didn't have characters doing something unexplained. Like killing off Spider-Man permanently, for example."

THE GAMES WERE accompanied by a series of *Questprobe* comics written by Adams and inked and drawn by Marvel artists. "It was an incredible experience to meet the Marvel folks and work with them," he says. "One of the highlights of my career. I still remember when Stan Lee autographed one of the comics I had written for the series." The *Questprobe* comics had different storylines to the games, and Adams remembers them serving as tie-ins, with each comic containing a section where the superhero "was thrown or pushed or otherwise tricked through a portal the Chief Examiner created. The reader was told if they wanted to find out what happened in there, they would need to buy the game."

Marvel gave Adams the freedom to decide which characters appeared in each game: "Hulk, I saw as an easy target, as his power set was limited. To be able to work with [the Fantastic Four] meant I had to have a well-planned adventure, and that would take some time." For this reason, *The Hulk* became the first game in the series, with an easy difficulty level to help ease Marvel fans into the adventure gameplay. *Spider-Man* came next, followed by *The Fantastic*



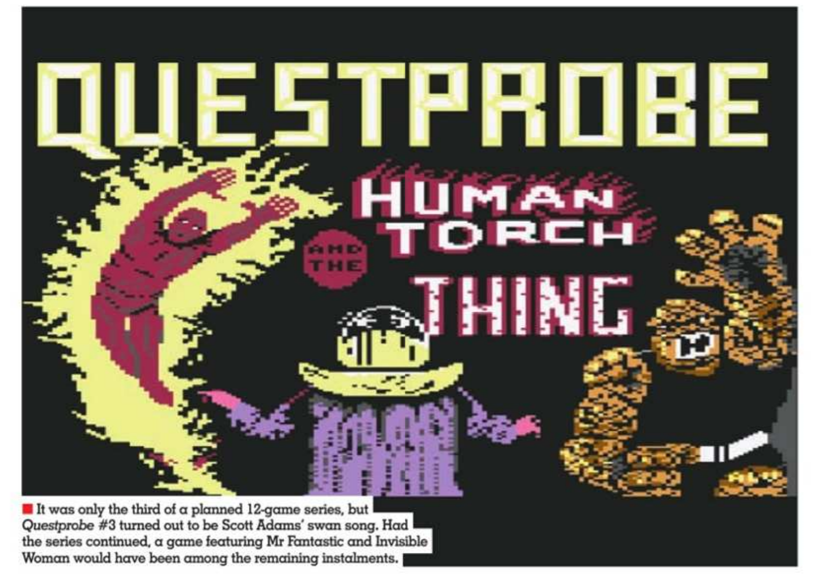
Adventure #5, *The Count*, had players trying to defeat Count Dracula during a three-day stay in his Transylvanian castle. The game featured a day/night cycle, with time-based events and puzzles that could only be solved at specific points during the three days.



"Of all my games, the first five adventures probably sold the most through the life of the series," Adams speculates. "Part of this was due to Commodore issuing those five on cartridges for the VIC-20." These first five games were *Adventureland*, *Pirate Adventure*, *Mission Impossible* (aka *Secret Mission*), *Voodoo Castle* and *The Count*.

ADVENTURE WARS

Though Adventure International was the first company to sell interactive fiction games, the competition wasn't far behind. Also inspired by *Colossal Cave*, MIT students developed *Zork* in the Seventies – Adams played it on the Stromberg-Carlson mainframe, before he founded Adventure International. Those students went on to form Infocom and released a commercial version of *Zork* in 1980. Sierra's first game, *Mystery House*, was also released in 1980 as a text/graphics hybrid similar to the SAGA games. Adams wasn't too curious about his competitors: "I did play other games, but stayed away from any adventures, as I was afraid of polluting what I was doing. I wanted all my adventures to be unique."



It was only the third of a planned 12-game series, but *Questprobe* #3 turned out to be Scott Adams' swan song. Had the series continued, a game featuring Mr Fantastic and Invisible Woman would have been among the remaining instalments.

Four, which Adams cites as one of the favourite games of his career. It featured the Thing and the Human Torch as playable characters, with gameplay that required switching between them and taking different actions in different locations to succeed. Although both roles could be assumed by a single player, Adams considered it an opportunity for two players to collaborate, making *The Fantastic Four* an early example of story-based multiplayer gaming. When asked why only two of the superheroes were playable in the adventure and not all four, he admits: "It was my decision. I had to limit how much I could get into a game." A second *Fantastic Four* title likely would have come later in the *Questprobe* series. An *X-Men* game was next in line but was canceled when Adventure International went out of business in 1985.

Only two years earlier, Adams' company had experienced its best sales year ever, with $3 million in revenues. But the videogame market was changing fast, with Apple and IBM computers and the Nintendo Entertainment System overshadowing other platforms. Adams describes issues with Texas Instruments and Commodore at the heart of Adventure International's shutdown. After years of selling the TI-99/4A at a loss to compete with Commodore and others, Texas Instruments discontinued the computer, taking with it a major platform for Scott Adams' text adventures. "The TI had great guts but the external system was pretty much junk," he recalls. "That's what sunk their sales. If they had put a real keyboard on it and left off the cartridge slot they would have sold a ton and not gone out of business."Licensing issues also caused problems: "I had licensed Commodore to have the exclusive rights to the Marvel *Questprobe* series. They basically sat on it, and this was a big problem. They ended up having to buy out of their contract at ten cents on the dollar. It was a major loss of planned revenue."

■ Unlike Adams' earlier games, which had anonymous protagonists, the *Questprobe* games put the player in the role of a superhero.

"I REMEMBER WHEN STAN LEE AUTOGRAPHED A COMIC I HAD WRITTEN FOR THE SERIES"

■■■ WITH HIS COMPANY bankrupt, Adams returned to his original calling: programming. He went to work for engineering firm Esterline AVISTA, where he remains today as a senior programmer. It would be 15 years before Scott Adams designed another game. In 2000 he released *Return To Pirate's Island 2* for Windows PCs, but admits it was more of a novelty project than a business endeavour: "I only did this because numerous fans kept requesting something. It was fun but hasn't really sold any great number." The game returns to its text-only roots with an enhanced parser that understands full sentences, and boasts sound effects and a built-in hint system. It sells for $19.95 from Adams' website (www.msadams.com). "I have a shelved game that I keep thinking I will get back to, but haven't in some time," he adds.

If this seems like a sad end to the tale of the man who unleashed story-based gaming on the world, remember how Adams describes himself: a programmer who creates games when there are none to be played. Forty years after he taught his school's computer to play tic-tac-toe, there are plenty of games out there, and Adams enjoys many of them. "Post [Adventure International], I enjoyed playing *Myst* and its series of games," he says. Today, "I mostly enjoy MMOs such as *EverQuest II*, *City Of Heroes*, and currently I'm messing around in *Age Of Conan*. I also enjoy RPGs on the Xbox 360 such as *Oblivion* and *Fable II*." It comes as no surprise that someone who was once drawn to *Colossal Cave Adventure* still looks for games that tell a good story. The worlds and the treasure hunts have grown, but at their core, these games are open-ended sandboxes that can be explored by answering that simple and timeless question: "WHAT SHALL I DO?" For this, we all have Scott Adams to thank.



■ Marvel created artwork for the packaging of the *Questprobe* games, while Adventure International was responsible for the in-game graphics.

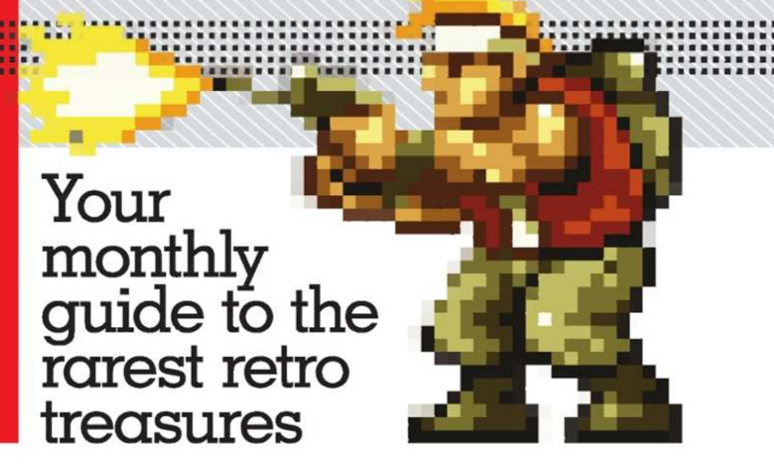


■ The Limited Gold Edition featured Adams' first 12 adventures in special packaging. Not knowing the end was near, Adventure International guaranteed to support the cassettes and disks until 2001.





COLLECTOR'S CORNER



Your monthly guide to the rarest retro treasures

DETAILS

Format: Neo Geo AES
Year: 1996
Publisher: SNK
Developer: Nazca
Expect to pay: Around £1,000



EXHIBIT A: The clamshell box. Keep an eye out for photocopied sleeves. They could indicate a converted MVS cartridge inside.

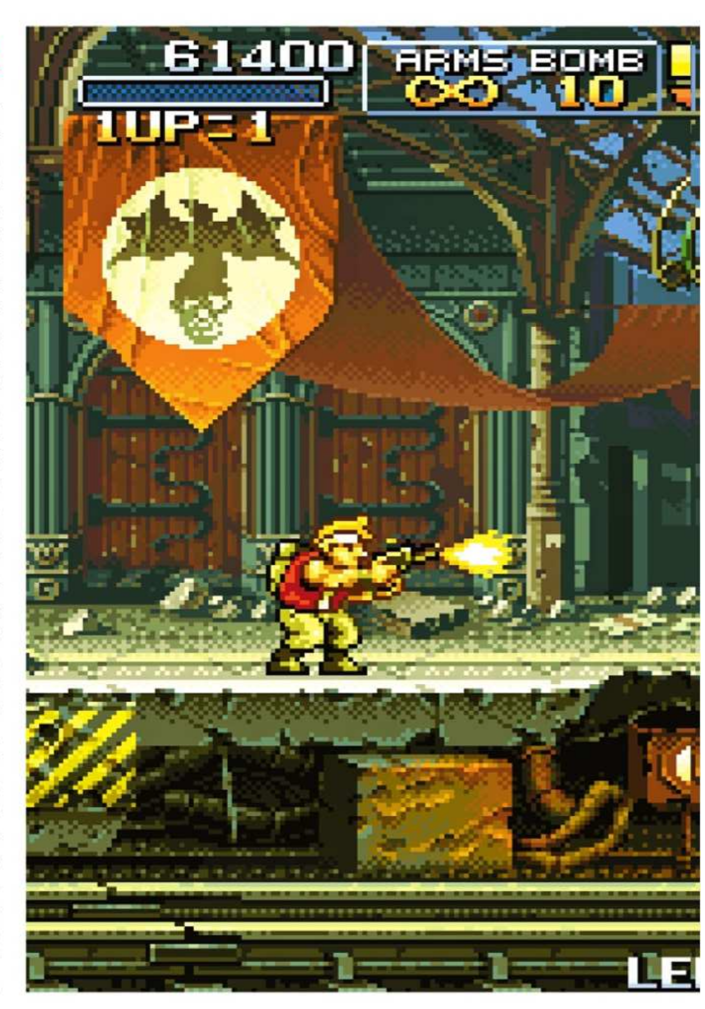


EXHIBIT B: One quarter of all Japanese cartridges are thought to be pirated. Consult the experts at Neo-Geo.com if you're unsure.

METAL SLUG

Why It's Rare

THOUGH EVERYONE is now well aware of the extremely high quality of the *Metal Slug* games, the series was something of an unknown quantity back in 1996. Cautiously released into arcades that April, SNK must have known it had a good game on its hands but couldn't possibly predict whether it would go down well with gamers in the post-*Virtua Fighter*, 3D-obsessed market. Of course, the arcade game went on to become hugely popular, but SNK didn't wait to see this and quickly released a limited run of cartridges just five weeks after the arcade version debuted. SNK's short-sightedness caused an extreme imbalance between supply and demand as every single one of the millions of Neo Geo owners around the world clamoured for one of just a few thousand cartridges. Prices quickly escalated from the naturally high retail price up to astronomical figures of £1,000+. Now, over a decade on, many Neo Geo collectors will tell you that *Metal Slug* is far from rare in comparison to other titles (there are only four known European copies of *Kizuna Encounter*, for example), but the truth is that the authoritative Neo-Geo.com still lists the US cartridge as "extremely extra rare" with a value that continues to rise.



Worth Playing?

■■■ YOU BET IT IS. The *Metal Slug* series is undoubtedly among the top three run-and-gun titles of all time and the first *Slug* is arguably the finest of the lot. Packed full of humour, slick finely tuned gameplay and exquisite pixel art, it is and always will be a 2D masterpiece. Yet while the Neo Geo AES version is 100 per cent faithful to the coin-op, it doesn't quite provide the best playing experience, especially for the price. For a fraction of the cost you can get the Neo Geo CD, PlayStation, or Saturn versions, all of which include the bonus Combat School mode, which gives the player new missions to complete on the levels they've cleared. Alternatively you could download the Virtual Console release of the AES cartridge on Wii for the bargain price of 900 Points. At over £1,000 then, the excellent gameplay of *Metal Slug* doesn't come close to justifying the AES price tag in comparison to other releases. So, unless you really love the tangible value of playing on one of those super-sized cartridges and SNK arcade sticks then the AES cart should be viewed primarily as a collector's item above all else.



If you'd like **games**™ to feature you and your prized possession in Collector's Corner then email us at **retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk**



I'VE GOT ONE

Name: **Frazer Rhodes**
Occupation: **Flood Incident Manager**

■■■ Why collect Neo Geo games and what drew you to Metal Slug in particular?

My interest started way back in 1990 when the system was first launched and screenshots of the games appeared in magazines. It was way out of my price range back then, but after months of hard toil at a screen-printing factory, I finally managed to save up and buy a second-hand AES with *Fatal Fury* and *Robo Army*. After that I was hooked.

Once you start collecting Neo games it grips you, the rarity of some carts means there's plenty of competition when titles like *Metal Slug* come up for sale. Rationale goes out the window when you're bidding on a much-needed title for your collection. *Metal Slug* is just the one everyone wants, the animation, the gameplay, the arcade feel, it's the original and that's what counts.

Tell us how you found the game.

I planned to buy a copy in Japan. I travelled to Tokyo in 2006 and bought lots of Neo games in Akihabara and at Mandarake Galaxy in Nakano, but I couldn't track down a copy. I tried again in 2007 visiting Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya, but again I drew a blank and purchased lots of other retro games, but, alas, no *Metal Slug*. So with the collection expanding and a big gap in the *Slug* series, I turned to a trusted retro-game import specialist videogameimports.com to source me a copy from Japan.

What condition was the game in and how much did you pay for it?

It was an original in mint condition, and I paid £500.

Do you actually play the game? If so, what do you think of it?

I play all my Neo Geo games… okay, well maybe not the unplayable Japanese text ones like *Quiz King Of Fighters*, but I do try. They're not just for show. *Metal Slug* is a classic of its time, but still offers a fantastic experience now. The game is just so clever with great little touches.

Finally, would you ever consider selling the game, or is it yours for life?

Well, I'm not alone in having sold a Neo Geo collection to then buy all the games back. Neo Geo is addictive like that. I'm sure if I sold the copy of *Metal Slug* I'd only end up buying another at some point. It will be a centrepiece of my collection and this one won't be for sale.





BEHIND THE SCENES

ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS

It's zombie time. Grab your popcorn, turn off the lights, and join games™ as we unravel the origins of one of gaming's finest horror parodies



Released: 1993
Format: SNES/Mega Drive
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Konami

KEY STAFF:
Mike Ebert (designer/programmer)
Dean Sharpe (designer/programmer)
The Fat Man (audio)
Mark Haigh-Hutchinson (additional coding)

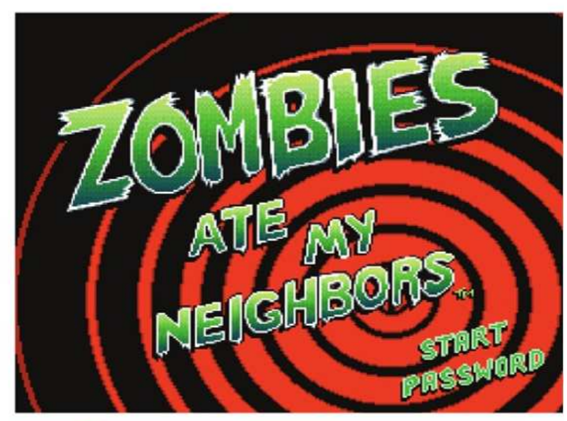
WHEN THINKING OF LucasArts in the Nineties, most people will conjure up images of epic *Star Wars* titles and an era of adventure games starring an eclectic cast of a psychotic rabbit-and-dog duo, evil tentacles, heavy-metal bikers, and a certain wannabe pirate. And yet a closer look unearths an overlooked gem called *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* – better known as *Zombies* in the UK – a run-and-gun game that combines the world of horror with the zany humour that LucasArts was renowned for at the time.

The mastermind behind the comic parody is Mike Ebert, who started out looking for work in the comic book industry. A friend noticed that LucasArts was hiring, and suggested Ebert apply. He used his time to practise drawing Indiana Jones with a mouse on a Mac. "It was the first time I'd ever really drawn without paper or pencil. I went into Lucasfilm, and they gave me an art test on the computer. I got hired that day to do work for an Indiana Jones videogame."

While Ebert got to work on many of LucasArts' early classics like *Monkey Island* and *Indiana Jones*, it was *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* that became his pet project. The idea for the game came from a demo created with Ed Kilhman who was working on graphic routines to be used in the interfaces for the *X-Wing* games. "Ed let me play around with what he was building, and I mocked up a simple demo of a chainsaw-wielding maniac chasing a player around a house cutting down the doors and walls as he tried to find you. It was the sort of game that Ed and I joked about wanting to make but not the sort of thing anyone would ever let us do. About a year later this little demo would help sell the idea to management."

IT WAS THE SORT OF GAME THAT ED AND I JOKED ABOUT WANTING TO MAKE

Together with Dean Sharpe and a small group of coders, the team worked closely to create a game that paid homage to classic horror movies. "I like all monster movies, no matter how bad or cheap the production values. *Invasion Of The Saucer Men,* **CONTINUED >.**















"After the game shipped I was informed by the higher powers that we should not include George as a character in our games. I'm not sure he ever knew that we put him in there."











Censorship at work meant that the dripping blood was changed to a different colour so as not to offend gamers for the SNES release.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by: GENERAL SWINE

There is something very nostalgic about *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*. The majority of people won't remember it at first, but when prompted with details, you'll nearly always hear unanimous appraisal. There was just something very special about it. It seemed almost never ending.

Posted by: PART-TIME GAMER

Zombies Ate My Neighbors was simple, fun, and addictive. The co-op is why the game was so important, I remember I used to play it with everyone from my friends to my mother and everyone else in between.

Posted by: RUMBLECAT

Without doubt one of the best games on SNES, and one that's not aged at all. While some other classic titles need a little help from nostalgia to get you through them, *Zombies* still plays well, still looks great, and still makes me start to panic when the chainsaw-wielding maniacs start cutting through the hedges.

Posted by: RAIN

The vile little chucky dolls were a nightmare to kill and the werewolf potion was the best remedy for fighting the giant baby. I still shudder at the giant underground worms and how bloody hard it was to find the skeleton keys.

Posted by: JAMES

Zombies Ate My Neighbors was a B-movie fan's wet dream. You could have just as much fun spotting the film references as playing the game. It was like *Gauntlet* for the MTV generation.

Posted by: ADAMA14

This just bored me, to be honest... The zombies just kept coming back.



■ Chainsaw-wielding maniacs were only present in the American version of the game, with censorship issues meaning they were changed to lumberjacks in the European release.

Killer Clowns From Outer Space, Dawn Of The Dead, Child's Play, Lost Boys, Tremors, Them, Arachnophobia, and many more were all inspirations for us. Horror films that have some humour in them are definitely my favourites." Ebert's love of the horror genre led to the inclusion of many familiar monsters and the bulk of the levels' titles refer to a movie in some way.

Ebert explains a little more about the design process. "I ended up designing and doing the art for all of the levels. At first I was just trying to create as many different environments and game situations with the limited amount of memory I had. When designing them, I staged situations that were reminiscent of movies. What did I want to show first? Did I need to create some easier levels at the start to let the player learn the game? I knew I wanted that hedge maze with the chainsaw maniacs early in the game, so I used that as a foundation and laid out a progression around that. Eventually I realised that I could go about 20 levels in a row without too much repetition in themes." While creating the levels, Ebert also included a bonus level dedicated to *Day Of The Tentacle*, and a playable credits level based around the LucasArts offices. *The Day Of The Tentacle* artists were in the same building as our *Zombies* team, so we saw it everywhere," explains Ebert. "The LucasArts credit level seemed really easy to do. We could build levels very quickly, so we built our actual offices as a floor plan. They were very accurate, even down to the locations of everyone's desks. It really didn't occur to me at the time that having George Lucas out front of the office might be bad."

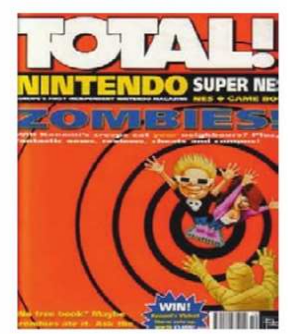
Rescuing neighbours from zombies, werewolves, killer babies, mummies, and other monsters was the main goal of the game, with an exit opened up once all ten had been accounted for. The victims varied from cheerleaders, tourists, teachers, burger flippers, babies, and archaeologists, all bearing a comical edge to their appearance. "Originally, the cheerleader was going to be Julie [the lead female character]. There was a movie, *Night Of The Comet* that had a gun-wielding cheerleader fighting zombies. We later changed it for some reason. If I were doing the game now, [the cheerleader] would be a playable character. The burger-flipping guy was a parody of somebody Dean Sharpe knew. The rest were just different people to fill up some of the environments. I would have liked to have 50 more neighbours, but there were memory restrictions. The evil school teacher was, of course, there to be worth the least points."

THE FAT MAN ALWAYS SHOWS UP DRESSED IN A RHINESTONE SUIT AND A BIG COWBOY HAT

Victims can be killed instantly by contact (although there are certain exceptions like the trampoline girl who can't die and a soldier who survives one hit but not the next), and it's a race to reach the neighbours. This is the game's basic flaw: a level can be completed by having just one surviving character. With this in mind, Ebert worked on expanding the size of the game from its original 36 levels. "The problem is that if you lose that one neighbour the game ends. If you have ten neighbours alive it takes much longer to proceed through a level, but you also aren't so close to losing the game completely. We knew we had this design problem, and when our publishing deal got delayed for three to four months, we decided to just add an extra 19 levels. That way we knew we had plenty of gameplay no matter how you played."

Much like cheesy horror movies, over dramatic sound effects play a huge part in atmosphere, and

What They Said...



"There's not an original gameplay feature in sight here, but it's incredibly fast, full of action, and the graphics are so funny you'll probably die laughing. Just don't come back as a zombie"

Total!, Issue 22



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



The *X-Wing* and *Day Of The Tentacle* teams provided inspiration for settings and bonus levels in *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*.



The *Monster Madness* games on Xbox 360 contain references to *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* and offer similar gameplay mechanics.



GOING ON PATROL

A follow-up called *Ghoul Patrol* was released, but as Ebert explains, it was never meant to be a sequel. "We gave our development tools to another team working with Lucas. They were building a different product with different characters. When the project encountered problems, someone at Lucas decided to try and save it by changing it into a sequel." *Ghoul Patrol* has a small fan base but fails to capture the spirit of the original. Despite this unofficial release, Ebert is keen to create a follow-up but has received an indifferent response from the copyright holders. "We approached [LucasArts] about acquiring the rights to do a GBA or DS version, but management didn't even know LucasArts made *Zombies*. They were not interested in spending the time to deal with us. My sequel would involve networking multiplayer, more kids to choose from, and a lot more levels."

this is also the case in *Zombies*, where blood-curdling screams and maniacal laughter make the game just as entertaining to listen to. "We didn't have a sound department that could do SNES sounds at LucasArts," Ebert explains, "so we took our computers and spent two days with a sound programmer in LA and created all the sounds effects for the game in that two-day session. We then got in touch with 'The Fat Man', and his team did our music. They did a great job, there are still two songs stuck in my head over ten years later. The Fat Man always shows up dressed in a rhinestone suit and a big cowboy hat. His self-marketing is great. You never forget him once you meet him."

Although LucasArts gave Mike Ebert and co the green light for *Zombies*, it showed little interest in the development, which actually worked in the team's favour. "They just left us alone, and didn't really try to change or influence anything. We were pretty low budget, and it was no huge loss if we didn't sell very well." After ten months the team took the game to CES where it received considerable interest. "With no publisher, we took the almost-completed game to CES and just let it run on the show floor. We got a lot of offers from publishers, very fast. When that started, LucasArts became very excited about the game." In the end, Konami offered LucasArts the publishing contract and came up with the unique title. "We really wanted 'Monsters' as the name, but there was a TV show with that name and we couldn't use it. When Konami bought the publishing rights from LucasArts, they came up with that name. At first I hated it, but since then I've realised it was a good choice."



Saving the most victims in each level is paramount, as this number is carried onto the next one, making later levels almost impossible if only a few have been rescued.



The tentacles from *Day Of The Tentacle* star in their own bonus level that pays tribute to the game.

Before the game could be released, some alterations were needed as a result of censorship. Despite the somewhat innocent cartoon style of the game and its tongue-in-cheek humour, it was decided that the name was considered unsuitable for certain countries and was shortened to *Zombies* for Europe. That isn't all that was changed for the European release, the much-loved chainsaw maniacs were transformed into lumberjacks with axes, with the level names altered accordingly. The SNES version, in all countries, suffered from Nintendo's strict family guidelines, with the blood dripping down the screen turned to a different colour as opposed to the crimson red of the Mega Drive release. Issues of censorship never worried Ebert. "I actually had to make the changes," he reveals. "I was pretty used to seeing censorship in a lot of game products, actually. When we did *Indiana Jones 3*, we had to take all the swastikas out of the art for Germany. So this wasn't too uncommon at that time." Censorship issues aside, the SNES and Mega Drive versions contained the same levels and content, with some minor alterations made to the Mega Drive's visual style to accommodate the difference in graphics chips. The latter began the conversion six months after the SNES, but by the end of development, both versions were in sync.

Despite Ebert's enthusiasm for a third game in the series (see Going On Patrol), the chances of a follow-up look slim. *Zombies* was recently given a rating as a potential download on Nintendo's Virtual Console, but this was withdrawn not long ago so it's looking likely that it will be left firmly in the past. Luckily it's one of those games that is relatively cheap to get hold of so if you still have a SNES or Mega Drive, it's worth digging up this classic and revisiting some old, rather undead friends.



Hall Of Fame...

SIMON BELMONT

Konami's original whip wielder has appeared in more Castlevania games than any other hero. He's also had the greatest number of hair colours

AS THE FIRST PROTAGONIST to appear in a *Castlevania* game, and the most prolific of the series' heroes, Simon Belmont has become synonymous with videogame vampire slaying. He's one of the most memorable personalities of the NES era and has been adopted into the wider culture of gaming as a whole. He was one of the few non-Nintendo characters to feature regularly in TV cartoon show *Captain N: The Game Master* and has made cameos in more games than he has appeared in *Castlevania* titles. He's a playable character in arcade brawler *Battle Tryst* and GameCube *Smash Bros* clone *DreamMix TV World Fighters*; he's a major character in Konami's *Wai Wai World* series; and he's also appeared in other games you wouldn't expect, such as *Ganbare Goemon 2, New International Track & Field*, and even *Evolution Skateboarding*. Despite fan demand for the darker, edgier Alucard to take the central role, Simon Belmont is soon to play the lead in an upcoming *Castlevania* movie.

DESPITE HIS POPULARITY, little is known about Simon's origin, either in the story of the game or the context of his design. His first appearance was in the 1986 MSX release *Vampire Killer*, for which one F Hayakawa is credited as the art designer, but nothing else is currently known about the decisions that influenced his design. The game itself is virtually bereft of any narrative, but the synopsis on the back of the box reveals that Simon acquired his magical whip from his father – a detail expanded on in future games as we learn that the whip, also called Vampire Killer, is a family heirloom that passes between generations of Belmonts and links many of the protagonists of the different *Castlevania* games.

Simon's next appearance was in the smash NES title *Castlevania*. Rather than being a sequel, it was a remake of the MSX original – a retelling of the story but with slightly different gameplay and graphics. This strange fact is one that can actually be applied to almost all of Simon's appearances throughout the *Castlevania* series. Subsequent releases, *Haunted Castle* (Arcade), *Super Castlevania IV* (SNES), *Akumajou Dracula* (X68000) and *Castlevania Chronicles* (PSone) are all set in 1691 but feature variations on the gameplay.

One of the most unusual repercussions of Vampire Killer's cross-platform retellings is the way Simon's visual design altered with each iteration. There was no guideline for Simon's look, so in each game he was almost unrecognisable from the last. His build, his clothing and his hair would change.

With the release of PSone's *Castlevania Chronicles* – itself an enhanced port of the X68000 game – in 2001 a standard design was locked down. The concept art for the release was drawn by Ayami Kojima, who helped re-invigorate the franchise with *Symphony Of The Night*, and Simon's red hair and brown leather clothing became the definitive look.

A year after *Chronicles'* release, in the run up to the debut of GBA game *Harmony Of Dissonance*, new *Castlevania* producer Koji Igarashi wrote a new timeline for the series, which immediately became the official canonical story for the series' complex narrative. In this timeline, several previous games were wiped from the canon and with them much of Simon Belmont's established history was rendered irrelevant. The only Simon games now considered canonical are the NES version of *Castlevania* and its direct sequel, *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest*. Not even the fan-favourite *Super Castlevania IV* would be considered an official part of the overall story.

The biggest change to come from Igarashi's re-write was the removal of *Haunted Castle* from the timeline. This obscure arcade game (only recently converted to a home format with the 2006 PS2 release) is one of the lesser-known *Castlevanias*, but also the one that offered the most insight into Simon's back story. In fact, the most memorable part of the game is the opening cut-scene in which Simon's betrothed is snatched away by Dracula, leaving Belmont standing alone in an uncharacteristic white wedding suit.

It's unfortunate that such an iconic moment has effectively been wiped from the *Castlevania* history books and even more unfortunate that Simon Belmont has remained nothing more than the sort of hollow shell that defined heroes of the NES era while his modern predecessors have been extensively fleshed out.

With each entry in the *Castlevania* series gradually adding more layers of depth to the franchise's mythology, we can only hope that Igarashi will one day leave the dark and moody cast of the latest games and build a new title around Simon Belmont, finally giving him the background and personality he's been lacking for years.

>. MAGIC MOMENTS


The iconic scene in which Simon approaches the gates to Castlevania. (C64 version.)

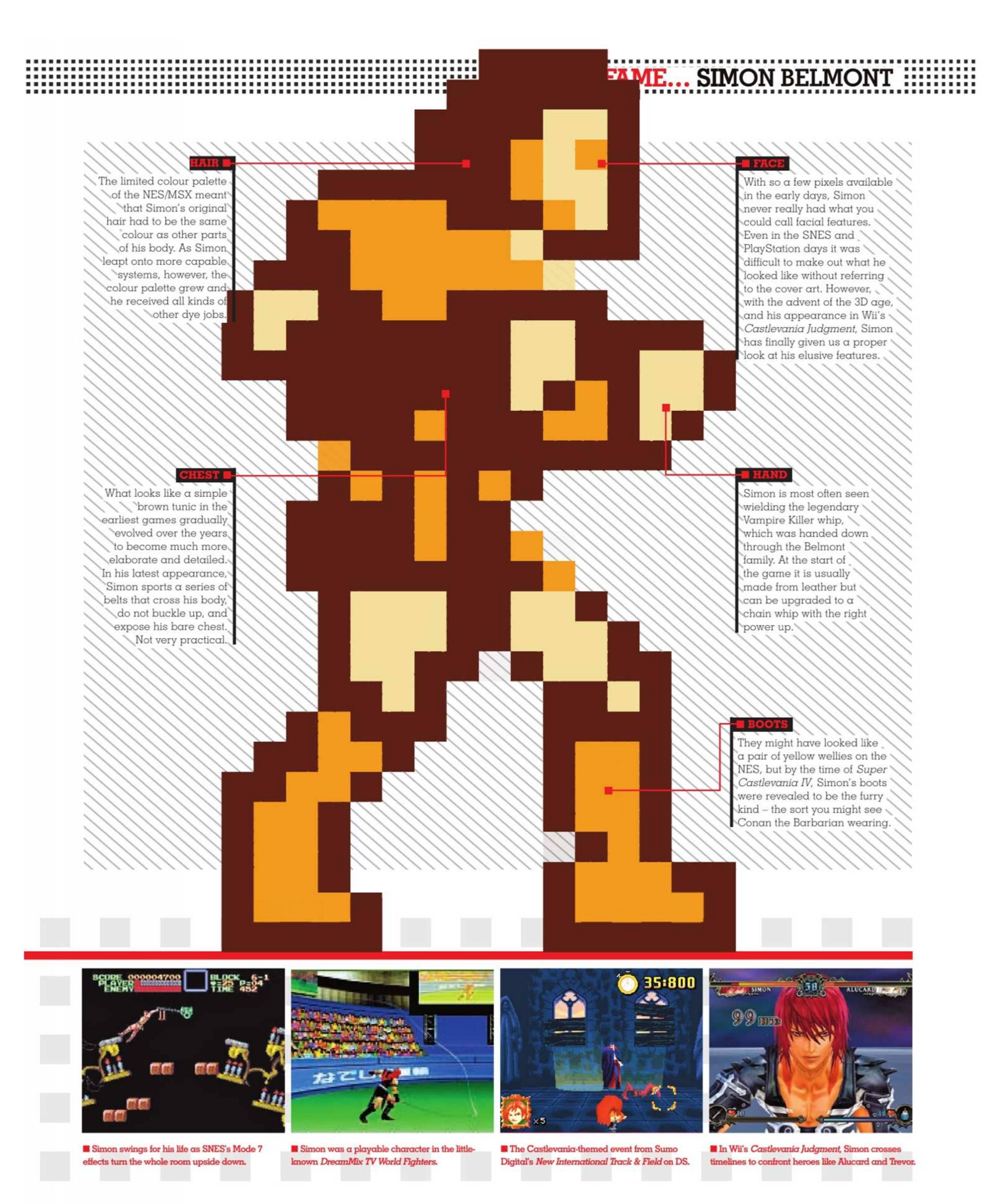


The very first boss that Simon meets: a huge vampire bat. (PSone, *Castlevania Chronicles*.)


Simon's wife is snatched away from him in the introduction to the arcade game, *Haunted Castle*.



The first of many battles against Count Dracula, from the climax of the first NES game.



HAIR

The limited colour palette of the NES/MSX meant that Simon's original hair had to be the same colour as other parts of his body. As Simon leapt onto more capable systems, however, the colour palette grew and he received all kinds of other dye jobs.

FACE

With so a few pixels available in the early days, Simon never really had what you could call facial features. Even in the SNES and PlayStation days it was difficult to make out what he looked like without referring to the cover art. However, with the advent of the 3D age, and his appearance in Wii's *Castlevania Judgment*, Simon has finally given us a proper look at his elusive features.

CHEST

What looks like a simple brown tunic in the earliest games gradually evolved over the years to become much more elaborate and detailed. In his latest appearance, Simon sports a series of belts that cross his body, do not buckle up, and expose his bare chest. Not very practical.

HAND

Simon is most often seen wielding the legendary Vampire Killer whip, which was handed down through the Belmont family. At the start of the game it is usually made from leather but can be upgraded to a chain whip with the right power up.

BOOTS

They might have looked like a pair of yellow wellies on the NES, but by the time of *Super Castlevania IV*, Simon's boots were revealed to be the furry kind – the sort you might see Conan the Barbarian wearing.

■ Simon swings for his life as SNES's Mode 7 effects turn the whole room upside down.

■ Simon was a playable character in the little-known *DreamMix TV World Fighters*.

■ The Castlevania-themed event from Sumo Digital's *New International Track & Field* on DS.

■ In Wii's *Castlevania Judgment*, Simon crosses timelines to confront heroes like Alucard and Trevor.

WHIP BEARERS

NOT EVERY CHARACTER IN THE CASTLEVANIA SERIES IS A BELMONT AND NOT ALL OF THEM HAVE CARRIED THE VAMPIRE KILLER WHIP. AND TO MAKE MATTERS EVEN MORE CONFUSING, THE GAME'S TIMELINE DOESN'T FOLLOW THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY WERE RELEASED. ALLOW US TO EXPLAIN AS WE UNRAVEL THE TIMELINE OF THE WHIP AND SHOW WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

1094

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

Leon Belmont acquires the Whip of Alchemy from Rinaldo Gandolfi and the whip is later fused with the soul of Leon's fiancée to create the Vampire Killer: a weapon capable of destroying Dracula and other demons of the undead.

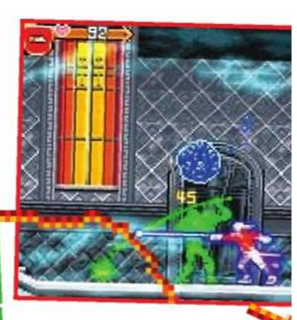
1476

CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

The whip is handed down between Leon's descendents until it reaches Trevor Belmont. Trevor becomes the first person to kill Dracula using the legendary whip, along with the help of Grant Danasty, Sypha Belnades and Alucard.







1797

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

After being possessed by Shaft, and later uncursed by Alucard, Richter arranges to have his soul absorbed into the Vampire Killer to prepare for the rebirth of Dracula in 1999. From this point on, anyone who can defeat the memory of Richter will take control of the whip, even if they are not a Belmont.

1792

DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD

Richter Belmont sets out with the inherited Vampire Killer to rescue his loved ones from Dracula..

1917

CASTLEVANIA: THE NEW GENERATION

The whip eventually finds its way into the hands of John Morris, son of Quincy Morris from Bram Stoker's original novel. John, along with Eric Lecarde stops Countess Bartley from reviving her uncle, Dracula.



1852

CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS

Michael Gelhart Schneider, a distant descendent of the Belmonts, comes into possession of the whip, but never actively uses it. Instead he trains his son Reinhardt to wield it and it is he who defeats Dracula in 1852.



1944

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

During World War II, John Morris's son Jonathan uses the Vampire Killer to defeat a vampire named Brauner. His father never taught him how to unlock the full power of the whip, however, so he also uses other weapons while he works on upgrading the whip's potential.



1479
CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNES

Trevor confronts Hector, an ex-forgemaster of Dracula's, but soon comes to realise that they are on the same side and agrees to help him. Trevor is injured before the final encounter, however, and Hector is forced to fight Dracula alone.

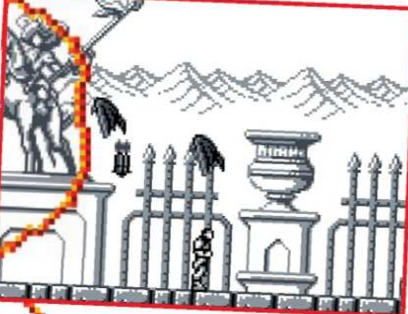


1576
CASTLEVANIA ADVENTURE

Count Dracula rises from the dead in Transylvania, but is defeated, this time by Christopher Belmont, descendent of Trevor and great-grandfather of Simon.

1591
CASTLEVANIA II: BELMONT'S REVENGE

Defeated but not quite dead, Dracula returns to kidnap Christopher's son, Soleiyu, and turns him into a demon. Christopher eventually defeats the Count, however, and manages to return Soleiyu to human form.



1691
CASTLEVANIA

The same old story. Dracula comes back from the dead, but a member of the Belmont family is waiting for him. This time it's Simon who sends Dracula back into darkness with the aid of the Vampire Killer.



1698
CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST

Simon sets out to free the land of Dracula's curse by finding and destroying each one of his remaining body parts. During the process, he accidentally revives Dracula but uses the Vampire Killer to defeat him for the final time.





1748
CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE

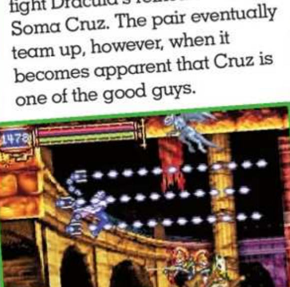
Juste Belmont, grandson of Simon, takes up the whip to fight his friend Maxim, who has become possessed by the spirit of Dracula.

1999
THE DEMON CASTLE WARS

The whip eventually works its way back to its owners when it is acquired by Julius Belmont. Julius kills Dracula once he is resurrected, as Nostradamus predicted. After his defeat, Dracula is sealed away within a solar eclipse to prevent him from returning from the dead, the Vampire Killer is buried along with Castlevania, and Julius loses his memory. Note: the Demon Castle Wars has not yet received a game of its own, but is expected to at some point in the future.

2035
CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

Still suffering from amnesia, Julius finds himself in Castlevania when it unexpectedly arises. There he regains his memory and relocates the whip in order to fight Dracula's reincarnation, Soma Cruz. The pair eventually team up, however, when it becomes apparent that Cruz is one of the good guys.

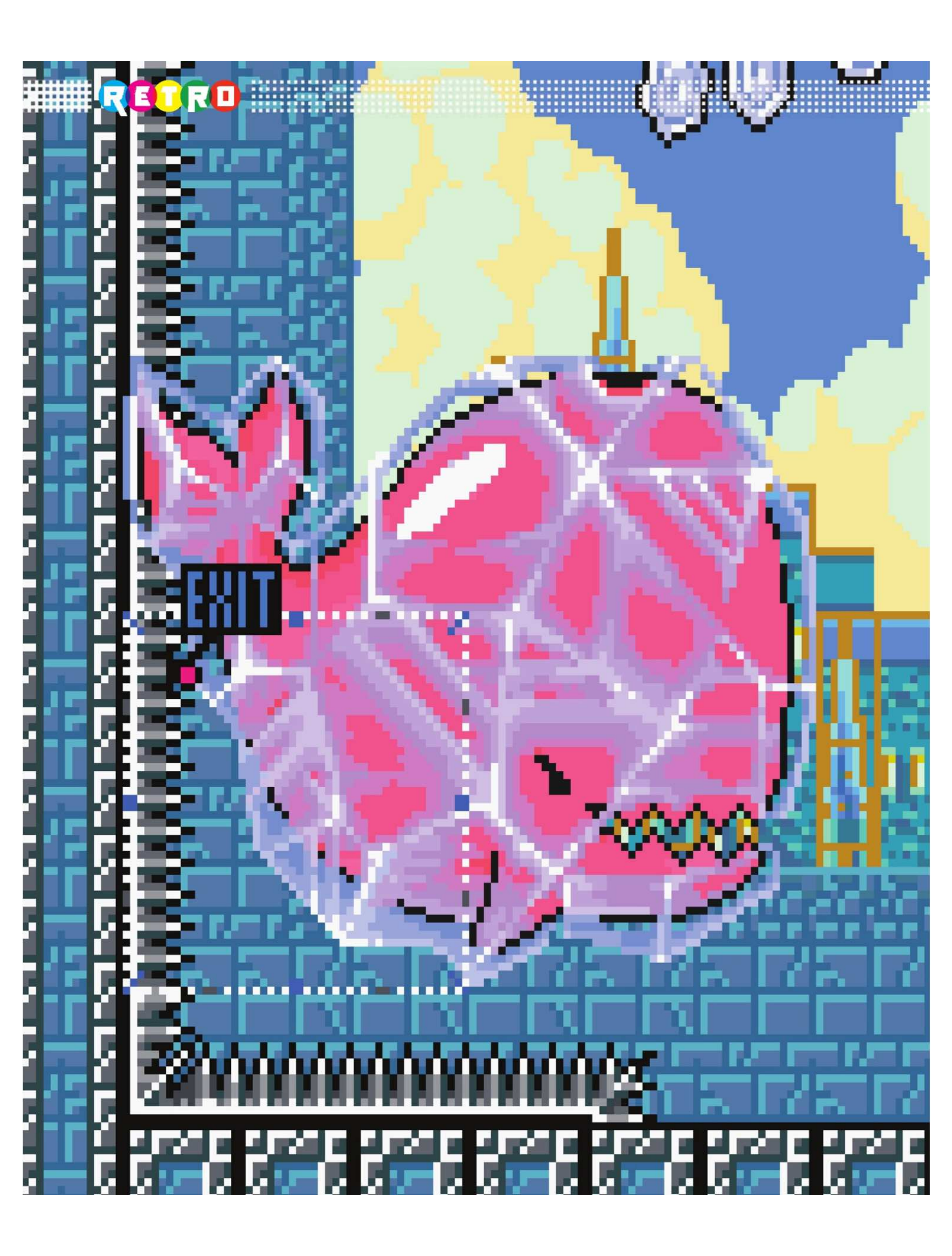




2036
CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

Julius helps Soma to defeat a cult that hopes to steal the power of Dracula from within Soma's soul.

Please note: this Whip Bearers timeline is based upon Koji Igarashi's official rewrite of the *Castlevania* history. It therefore ignores non-canon games such as *Castlevania Legends* in which Sonia Belmont wields the Vampire Killer.

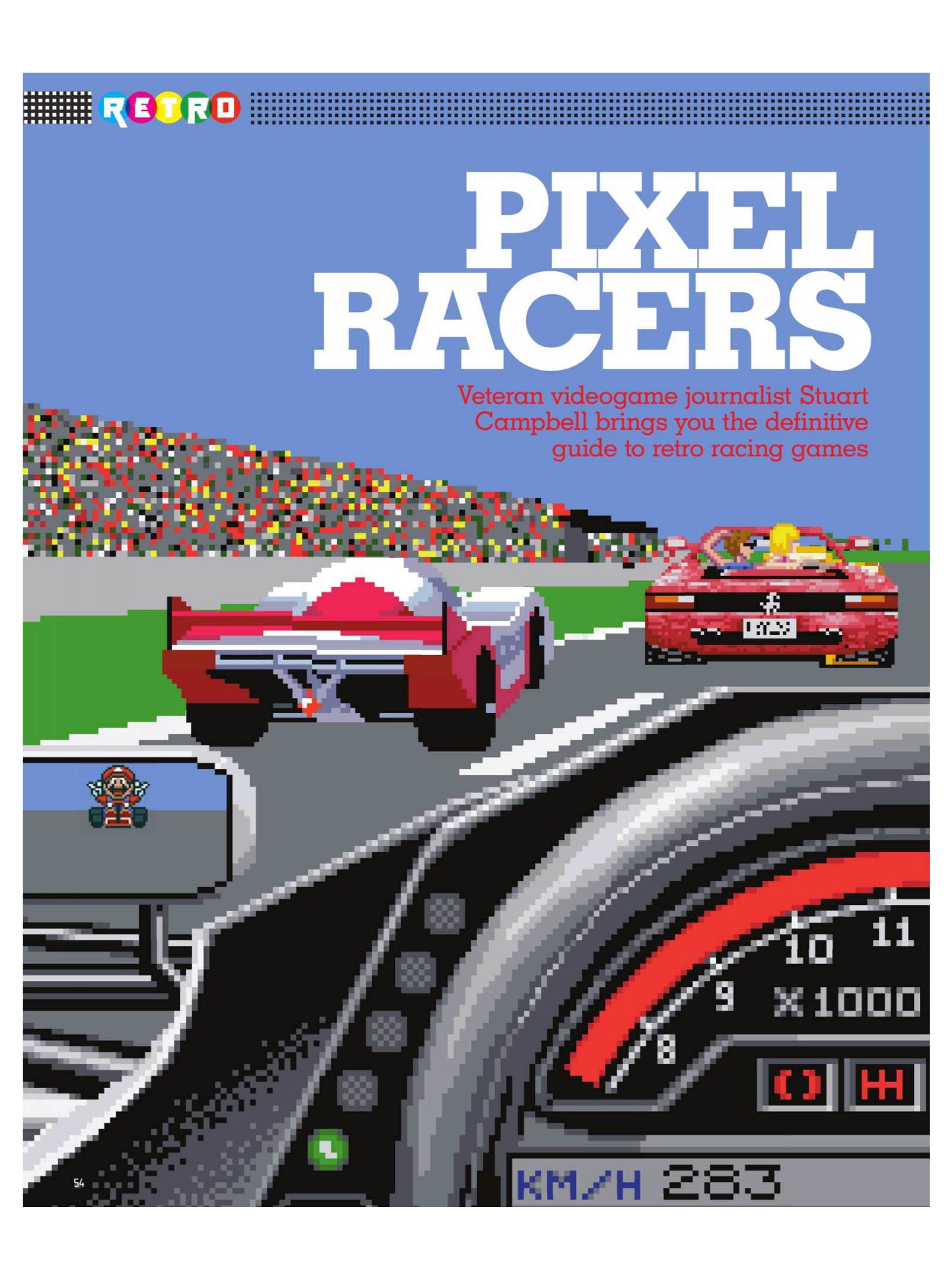

RETRO
EXIT



NEW ZEALAND STORY Arcade [Taito] 1988

BEST BOSS

FROM MOBY-DICK to *Pinocchio* and *Ocarina Of Time*, conflicts with whales have featured in popular culture. But if we had to pick one landmark whale scrap, it'd be this battle in *New Zealand Story*. After guiding Tiki the kiwi through three perilous levels, you find yourself trapped in a room with a weird pink whale. Avoiding the snowflakes he shoots at you, there's just time to fire a few arrows his way before he leans in and swallows the kiwi whole. Brilliantly, the fight continues in the belly of the beast and provides only a few millimetres in which to avoid the whale's dripping stomach acid. Never have we been so thrilled by beating a boss from the inside out.



PIXEL RACERS

Veteran videogame journalist Stuart Campbell brings you the definitive guide to retro racing games

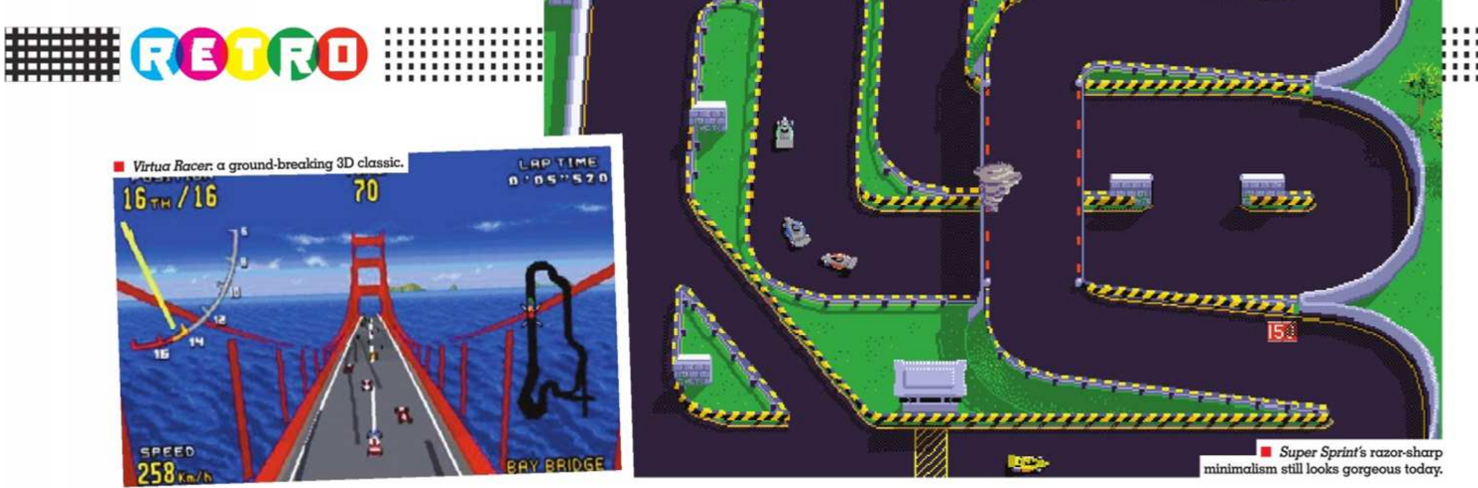
ATARI'S 1976 CLASSIC *Night Driver* gave gamers their first experience of driving a car in a videogame. A black screen decorated with a series of short white posts disappearing into the horizon produced an eerily convincing sensation of 3D. Speeding through the moonlit world at the kind of game velocity the hardware could impart by essentially having no graphics – even the car bonnet was a plastic sticker attached to the monitor – you couldn't afford to take your eyes off the screen for a second.

The steering wheel came next in the *Sprint* series of overhead-viewed circuit games, starting with *Sprint 2* in 1976, confusingly followed by *Sprint 4* and *Sprint 8* in 1977 and finally *Sprint 1* in 1978. Although the various games did have different tracks, the numbering denotes not sequels but numbers of players. *Sprint 8* was therefore playable by an impressive eight players all squished around one fairly normal-sized machine and making arcade owners swoon. To compensate for the lack of human opposition, *Sprint 1* does a remarkable and unique thing: the tracks change while you're driving. One minute you're zooming round a simple loop, then, without warning, the entire course switches to a complex crossover route, and then a few seconds later to a zig-zag collection of long straights, and so on. If you're not expecting it – and why would you? – it is hugely startling and scary.

Night Driver and *Sprint* both had purely functional graphics: abstract lines and dots, which served only to mark the distinction between the traversable course and the 'walls' marking the boundaries. The first coin-op driving game to feature graphics as we understand the term today was Atari's 1977 release *Super Bug*, which gave the player an identifiable vehicle – a VW Beetle – and some dense woodland through which to drive. *Super Bug* also saw the first introduction of 'realistic' handling. In addition to having to cope with manual switching through four gears – something not seen in arcade games in the following 30 years – your Bug is prone to drift, fishtailing like crazy if you go round corners too fast. It's an incredibly demanding game that will leave the most dedicated modern racing fan weeping softly in a corner within minutes.

Not satisfied with that, Atari followed *Super Bug* with the similar *Fire Truck* the next year. Despite being greyscale, *Fire Truck* also saw a significant aesthetic improvement, with the graphics now depicting an identifiable and rather attractive suburban landscape featuring houses, lawns, trees, and parked cars. The first, and so far only, co-op driving game charged two players with steering a single fire engine through the scrolling overhead course – one driving the cab, the other trying to control the trailer. It's absurdly difficult, and CONTINUED >.





■ *Virtua Racer*: a ground-breaking 3D classic.

■ *Super Sprint*'s razor-sharp minimalism still looks gorgeous today.

almost certainly the most technical driving game ever created, making a mockery of *Gran Turismo* fans and their wheel balancing and brake adjusting. Only when you can complete a 90-second *Fire Truck* run without a crash can you consider yourself a truly skilled pretend driver.

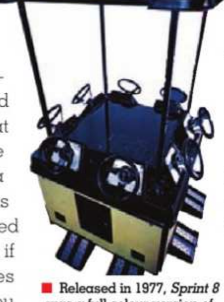
Arcade technology progressed quickly around this time, and by 1980 some dramatic leaps had been made, most notably in Sega's legendary racer *Monaco GP*. The first racer to feature variable terrain, *Monaco* had icy roads, puddles, gravel tracks, narrow bridges, and fantastic tunnel sequences where you could only see cars caught in the narrow conical beam of your headlights, all depicted in glowing full colour – *Monaco*'s modernist graphical style still looks good today, and the game was remade for PlayStation 2 a few years ago.

■■■ **MONACO'S UNOFFICIAL SEQUEL** *Turbo* in 1981 saw the debut of colour 3D graphics in driving games. Innovatively used to hide enemy cars in dips in the road, the 3D effect was pretty solid but by no means sounded the death knell for 2D racing – countless overhead-view vertically scrolling driving games would continue to come out for several more years, though mostly occupying smaller, quirkier corners of the market. It was the next 3D title, however, that would sew the seeds of racing games as we know them today.

Namco's 1982 hit *Pole Position* is a classic driving game in its own right – fast and slick with big colourful graphics and a memorable track based on the real-life Fuji Speedway – but it introduced a fundamental design change that made it extra popular with arcade owners and helped it become a worldwide smash. *Pole Position* was the first coin-op racer with a defined ending that would be reached even if you drove flawlessly – previous games theoretically went on forever if you didn't crash. Adding an upper time limit of about five minutes was a big draw for operators in the early-Eighties, when experts had honed their skills on games like *Asteroids*, *Pac-Man*, and *Defender* to the point where they could play for hours on a single credit. Handling was still pretty basic: with only two gears your car could take the tightest bends at full speed without skidding, but *Pole Position* was nevertheless the grandfather of the modern racer and would influence driving games for many years to come.

POLE POSITION WAS THE FIRST COIN-OP RACER WITH A DEFINED ENDING

The next few years were quiet in terms of significant developments, but 1986 would turn out to be one of the biggest watersheds in driving-game history, with banner releases in every area of the genre – most of them coming from Sega in a sudden determined effort to corner a market it hadn't had significant presence in since *Turbo*. For 2D fans, it knocked out a shameless *Road Fighter* (see Forgotten Ones #2) rip-off, the long-forgotten *Space Position*, and there were motocross thrills in the shape of *Enduro Racer*, a distant ancestor of *Sega Rally*. But the big news, of course, was *OutRun*. Building on the sprite-scaling technology of the previous year's minor motorbike hit *Hang-On*, *OutRun* blew arcade-goers away with its beautiful graphics, varied scenery, branching routes, evocative music, and let's be honest, rather mediocre driving model.



■ Released in 1977, *Sprint 8* was a full-colour version of *Sprint 2*, allowing for eight-player gaming.

The year wasn't over yet however, and veteran coin-op racing specialist Atari hit back with *Super Sprint*, a modern remake of the first driving game, *Gran Trak 10*. Along with stunningly crisp graphics, subtle additions to the short cuts, handling-enhancing power ups, and three steering wheels bolted to the front for multiplayer action made it a huge success, and a sequel, *Championship Sprint*, was released in arcades the same year.

Super Sprint revived the dormant overhead single-screen circuit-racing sub-genre, and later years would see derivatives like *Indy Heat*, *RC*

FORGOTTEN ONES #1

The most important driving games you've never heard of



■ So few games nowadays ever feature the instruction 'Go to church'.

Game: Kamikaze Cabbie
From: Data East (1984)

■■■ A FULL DECADE and a half before *Crazy Taxi* was released to massive acclaim and success, someone had already published the game and been roundly ignored for their trouble. *Kamikaze Cabbie*'s gameplay is almost indistinguishable from its popular descendant – the large city you can roam freely is there, the core 'find a passenger and take him where he wants to go' concept is the same, and it even has the big arrows to tell you which way to go. You can get away with bashing other vehicles around, and your passengers tip according to how fast you get them to their destination. It was a massive flop, but the author must have at least felt a warm glow 15 years later from the knowledge that *someone* had been watching.

Pro-Am, Badlands – itself the first modern-style battle-racing game – and in particular the immortally titled *Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road* generate more big hits for Atari among others. Countless clones, which appeared in arcades and for the 8-bit home micros, including at least half-a-dozen from Codemasters alone, also laid the groundwork for the evolution of the genre into scrolling games like *Supercars, Hot Rod,* and ultimately the much-loved *Micro Machines.*

1987 WAS MOSTLY a year of consolidation, with sequel releases like *Super Hang-On* and *Turbo OutRun*, along with Namco's spiritual successor to *Pole Position, Final Lap*. The most notable release of the year was Taito's *Full Throttle*, a staggeringly blatant rip-off of *OutRun* – it's a wonder Yu Suzuki and co didn't take the matter further. However, it's also clearly the skeleton that would later be fleshed out into *Chase HQ*, so there was a glimmer of redemption on the horizon.

The next great leap forward for the driving game wasn't far away, and in 1988 it arrived in the shape of *Hard Drivin'*. This was one of the most genuinely ground-breaking videogame releases of all time. Atari came up with the first proper driving simulation, introducing the first ever true polygon 3D, amid many other innovations. Your car had four gears – for the first time since the mid-Seventies – a complex functioning dashboard, a force-feedback steering wheel, and even an ignition key. You could wander freely around the game area exploring the two different tracks – Speed and Stunt, with its iconic loop-the-loop – to your heart's desire, even turning around and driving the wrong way round the course until your time ran out, if you so desired.

There were action replays of spectacular crashes – which was another interesting first for the racing genre – and the game remains practically unique apart from its own sequel *Race Drivin'*. It didn't get a halfway-decent home console conversion until its 2004 appearance on the excellent *Midway Arcade Treasures 2*, but now everyone can sample its uncompromising brutal difficulty for themselves. After a couple of laps of *Hard Drivin'*, controlling a real car is a piece of cake.

While the home formats of the time couldn't come anywhere close to the power required to run it, *Hard Drivin'* (along with another Sega sprite-scaler, 1988's *Power Drift* by notable *OutRun* designer Yu Suzuki) did provide the raw genetic material for Geoff Crammond's now-legendary *Stunt Car Racer* in 1989. *SCR* remains one of the most fondly remembered racing games of the 16-bit era and still occasionally inspires new titles, such as the excellent *GripShift*. But it was Crammond's next game that would, three years later, go on to exert a profound influence on the direction of the driving genre – *Formula 1 Grand Prix*.

Taking the simulation ball from *Hard Drivin'* and sprinting off over the horizon with it – stopping only to pinch a few ideas from *Indianapolis 500*, a 1989 Electronic Arts title, which was the first true simulation of a real-world race event – *F1GP* was an exhaustively detailed sim, including accurately mapped renditions of all 16 of the F1 tracks of its day and dozens of authentically detailed cars. But it was the driving model that captivated players by the thousand. Realistically complex and demanding, with endless possibilities for fiddling with the car's set up, the game offered you as much help with braking, accelerating, and steering as you wanted until you got used to the challenge of controlling the car unaided, a system that's been copied by every 'serious' driving game since. It was quite simply a masterpiece of design and implementation, made all the more astonishing by being essentially the work of a single person. Every F1 game of the last 17 years is basically just this with better graphics.

THAT YEAR ALSO saw the release of another driving game every bit as influential as *F1GP*, and even more successful, but which couldn't have been any more dissimilar to it. *Super Mario Kart* came out of nowhere, a seemingly throwaway spin-off release from the world-dominating platform series that appeared fully formed with barely a note of fanfare, but went on to become one of Nintendo's most valuable bloodlines. Knocked together so quickly it doesn't even have a proper single-player mode – solo racers still have to drive around in a split-screen letterbox, with half the display wasted on a near-useless map – *SMK* was nevertheless a CONTINUED>.



FORGOTTEN ONES #2
The most important driving games you've never heard of

Game: Road Fighter
From: Konami (1984)



READERS OF OUR splendid sister title **Retro Gamer** will already know about this one, but the word needs to be spread. *Road Fighter* is brilliant in its own right, and also unique as the only pure-racing coin-op ever to be controlled with a joystick rather than a steering wheel. More importantly, however, it also pioneered a feature that it would be impossible to imagine driving games without now. *Road Fighter* brought drift control to the racing-game genre. Crash into another car at high speed in *Road Fighter* and you don't simply explode – as was the fashion of the time – but rather you bounce off and slide across the road. The only way to regain control before you plough into the wall and blow up is to steer *into* the skid, just as you would in a real car – but the complete opposite of a gamer's intuition. It's a small step, but it created the most fundamental gameplay mechanic of every driving game today that features drifting – so that's all of them. *Ridge Racer, Daytona, OutRun 2006, Race Drive: Grid* – every one of them owes a debt to *Road Fighter.*



The first Le Mans videogame was Konami's 1986 arcade coin-op *WEC Le Mans*. Subsequently ported to home consoles.

The first racing games didn't feature any scenery to speak of.

Look, *Mario Kart 64* is just much better. Get over it.



Blue skies in *Ridge Racer Revolution*, the first of many sequels to Namco's all-time classic.

Crazy Cars 3 – exactly like *Need For Speed Carbon*, except with a decent frame rate.



WipEout – very, very briefly making games cool.



FORGOTTEN ONES #3

The most important driving games you've never heard of

Game: Stocker
From: Sente (1984)

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL racing-game franchise nowadays is the *Need For Speed* series, blending fast racing thrills with a seedy crime back story full of stereotype 'outlaws' with interesting haircuts. But its roots lie in a bizarre little arcade game born a decade earlier, which was the first racer to concern itself with zooming across the country outrunning the police. *Stocker* – in which you traverse several states, free to take short cuts across terrain and alternate routes – led directly to *Test Drive*, which in turn led to Titus's 16-bit cult classic *Crazy Cars 3* (introducing most of the character/story elements), which is the most recognisable ancestor of *Need For Speed.*



Impressively, *Stocker* even left tyre tracks in your wake as you took reckless short cuts through people's gardens.

runaway hit, helped by not only being able to race a friend on the normal grand-prix tracks, but also in a brilliant balloon-popping deathmatch game that's never been bettered by any of the many sequels. Other titles in the series have notably better courses and play mechanics – particularly *Mario Kart 64* – and allowed for many more players, but none have ever approached or even replicated the genius of *SMK*'s deathmatch.

WITH OCCASIONAL EXCEPTIONS like *Mario Kart* and successful series like the *Lotus Challenge* games on Amiga and Atari ST, driving games on home formats were still fairly rare in 1992, as even pseudo-3D racing stretched the hardware of the era to its limits. The arcade, however, posted notice of what was to come with the release of *Virtua Racing*, Sega's magnificent and ground-breaking true-3D classic that took *Hard Drivin*'s fully built and freely navigable worlds and finally gave them racing speed. It was the following year, however, that would be the biggest watershed in the history of the genre. 1993 saw the debuts of *Ridge Racer* and *Daytona*, two coin-op hits, which would turn out to be the flagships of the next generation of home-console wars.

The two games have much in common, not least the exaggerated drift-based handling style, which is almost ubiquitous now but was still in its infancy at the time. But *Ridge Racer* made it to market first, and the frankly incredible PlayStation conversion put together by a tiny handful of people in just six months for the machine's launch, all but strangled the Saturn at birth. While it actually did very well as a translation of the coin-op's gameplay, *Daytona*'s atrocious pop-up, crude textures, and iffy frame rate were an embarrassment next to the near-arcade-perfect PlayStation rendition of *Ridge Racer*, creating a perception of technical inferiority that would hamper Saturn all its life.

> **THE INCREDIBLE RIDGE RACER ALL BUT STRANGLED THE SATURN AT BIRTH**

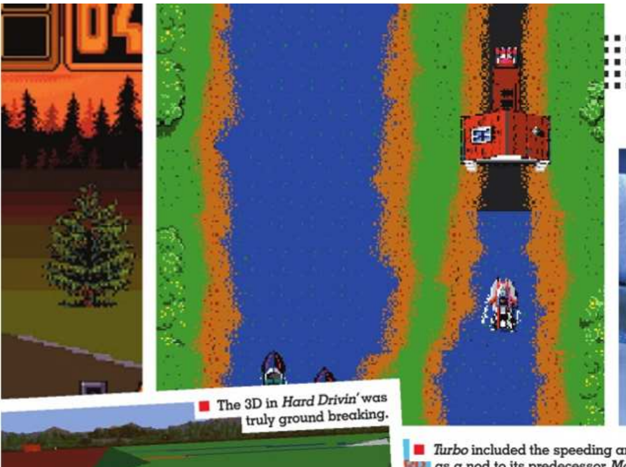
History also marks *Daytona* as slightly inferior to its Namco rival, evidenced by the numerous *Ridge Racer* sequels. *Daytona* only managed one unsuccessful arcade follow-up and none on home formats – unless you count the four semi-sequel reworkings of the original, which appeared on various formats in several territories: *Championship Circuit Edition*, *Deluxe*, *Circuit Edition*, and *2001* between them contributed six new tracks and several other new features, arguably making them as valid as sequels as standalone titles like *Ridge Racer Revolution*.

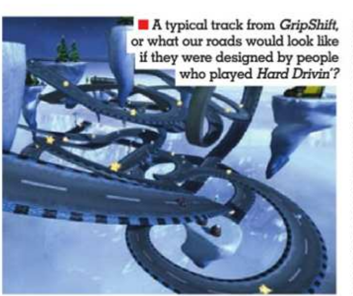
Historians differ on the reasons for *Ridge Racer*'s ultimate victory. Indeed, in arcades you're still more likely to encounter *Daytona* cabinets because Sega concentrated more on installing up to eight linked-up multiple machines, whereas Namco's flagship was the stunning single-player-focused "Full Scale" edition of *Ridge Racer*, featuring an entire real Mazda MX-5 car for the driver to sit in. Some point to its much friendlier drifting model, but the most convincing argument centres around character. While *Daytona* has very distinctive, memorable courses, they're oddly sterile and soulless, something that can be attributed to the bizarre near-total lack of buildings in them. While *Ridge*







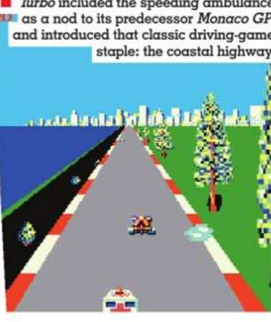




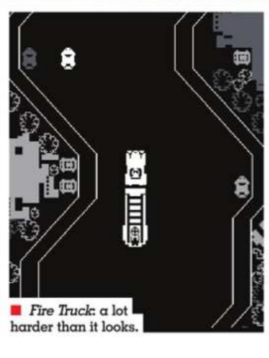
■ A typical track from *GripShift*, or what our roads would look like if they were designed by people who played *Hard Drivin'*?



■ The 3D in *Hard Drivin'* was truly ground breaking.



■ *Turbo* included the speeding ambulance as a nod to its predecessor *Monaco GP*, and introduced that classic driving-game staple: the coastal highway.



■ *Fire Truck*: a lot harder than it looks.

Racer appears to take place in a real city, instantly engaging the player in a captivating and believable environment reinforced by an excitable commentator, *Daytona* is set in a ghost world, with bridges and tunnels that lead from nowhere to nowhere with no sign of human habitation except the disembodied voices singing the famous backing songs.

1993 arguably marked the end of major innovation in the driving genre, and everything that's happened since has basically been a logical evolution of the gaming DNA already in place by that time. *WipEout* on PlayStation, for example, represented a cultural and economic phenomenon, but in gaming terms it's just *Super Mario Kart* with futuristic graphics. 1995's *Sega Rally* created a sub-genre of rallying titles, but the meaningful differences between it and road racers like *Ridge Racer* and *Daytona* were largely superficial (and were invented by *Monaco GP*, anyway), although it would eventually develop into the likes of PlayStation 3's *MotorStorm*, where the effect of different terrain becomes so significant that it genuinely alters the core gameplay mechanic.

■■■ **THAT LEAVES US** with only two significant strands of driving-game bloodline left to chart, a pair of close relations that comprise the two most prominent brands in the modern genre. The 1997 release on PlayStation of *Gran Turismo* was half of a cultural double-whammy that ended the brief *WipEout*-inspired era of console games being seen as hip and cutting-edge in the wider world of fashion. While lifestyle magazines like *The Face* were dazzled by the Designers Republic styling and big-beat soundtrack of the future racer and the iconic 'girl power' figure of Lara Croft, *Gran Turismo*, along with its spiritual sibling *Final Fantasy VII*, reasserted the dominance of the traditional obsessive, socially dysfunctional gamer over the world of videogaming.

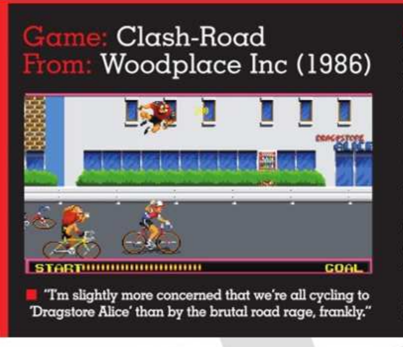
Not so much a driving game as a simulation of being a pit mechanic and a used-car dealer rolled into one, *Gran Turismo* picked up an oily baton from Crammond's *F1GP* and distilled it even further, fixating on a strange and highly selective definition of 'realism' aimed at science buffs with obsessive-compulsive disorder. In *Gran Turismo*, reckless thrill seekers are immediately discouraged by technical 'licence tests' bearing no relation to the skills required in actual races before they're allowed to enter one at all, yet the game inflicts only the smallest of penalties for smashing into opponents at 220mph. And the tracks are largely identikit grey professional circuits, with a few more-exciting street courses thrown in for variety.

The *Gran Turismo* series has shifted close to 50 million copies across the globe so far, not counting the suffocating hordes of less-accomplished clones it also inspired. One game that attempted to merge *Gran Turismo's* obsessive appeal with the character and exhilaration of *Ridge Racer* has been almost as successful – at least in terms of reaching its potential audience. *Metropolis Street Racer* arrived on Dreamcast in 2000 and applied realistic driving physics and real-life cars to a game not only set in glamorous and accurately mapped real-world city streets, but which also rewarded the player for irresponsible show-off stunt driving. Escaping the bonds of Sega's doomed console for Xbox and undergoing a name-change to *Project Gotham Racing*, the series went from strength to strength, offering car enthusiasts a slightly more exotic and expressive way to indulge a borderline-autistic collecting mania. Whoever said that *Gran Turismo* and *PGR* were basically Pokémon for slightly older gamers was a wise sage indeed.

And that's pretty much it for now. Every driving game of the last decade or more has been derived – with varying degrees and elements of crossover – from half-a-dozen basic part sets, namely *Ridge Racer*, *OutRun*, *WipEout*, *Crazy Cars 3*, *GTI Club*, and *F1GP*, and there's little sign of that changing in the foreseeable future, despite about one game in every three released for the major consoles being a driving title of some sort or another. Perhaps only a flop for the imminent *Gran Turismo 5* could cause a real shake up in the status quo. And it would take a brave man to predict that.

FORGOTTEN ONES #4 The most important driving games you've never heard of

Game: Clash-Road
From: Woodplace Inc (1986)



■ 'I'm slightly more concerned that we're all cycling to 'Dragstore Alice' than by the brutal road rage, frankly.'

■■■ SIDE-SCROLLING RACERS are rare, even in the early days of gaming. There are only a handful, and almost none involve cars – you can have motorbikes (*Excitebike*, *Super Bike*, *Motocross Maniacs*), people (*Metrocross*), or even scrawny desert birds chased by wild dogs (*Road Runner*), but with the exception of Atari's *Drag Race*, game makers seem to have something against side-viewed racing on four wheels. Rarer still are games set on bicycles. However, obscure Japanese outfit Woodplace not only came up with a side-scrolling bike racer, it also secretly invented one of the most famous series in gaming: EA's 1991 *Road Rash*.

Clash-Road looks misleadingly sedate, but it nonetheless bleeds violence from every pore. Pedalling along some lovely town and countryside roads, you wreak carnage wherever you go, punching opponents to knock them into roadside obstacles, concrete barriers, holes in bridges and so on. Joggers and wildlife aren't safe from this cycle-path psychopath either, gaining you bonus points and energy if you mow them down. You can be sure that the protagonist of this game grew up to live in Liberty City.





BEHIND THE SCENES

SONIC ADVENTURE

Ten years after the release of Sonic Adventure, director Takashi Iizuka speaks to games™ about the making of the most pivotal game in Sonic Team's flagship series



Released: 1998
Format: Dreamcast
Also On: PC, GameCube
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team

KEY STAFF:
Takashi Iizuka (Director)
Yuji Naka (Producer)
Kazuyuki Hoshino (Art Director)
Tetsu Katano (Lead Programmer)
Yuji Uekawa (Character Designer)

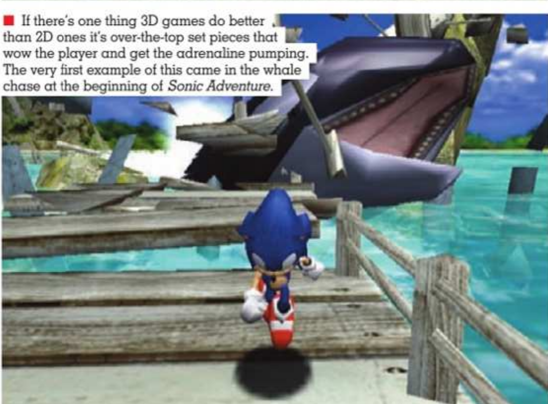


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG and the third dimension. It's a relationship that's never quite achieved perfection but has nevertheless fascinated gamers for over a decade. Where Sega's chief mascot was once considered Mario's equal, with the release of *Super Mario 64* the balance of power shifted as Nintendo created the mould for 3D platform games and Sega awkwardly shuffled its feet. The Saturn console came and went without a Sonic platform game; it was left to Dreamcast to realise Sonic's 3D debut. But what a debut. Visually superior to *Super Mario 64*, featuring character-based quests and blisteringly fast gameplay, it was classic Sonic and much more besides. And while the last decade of 3D Sonic games has been a mixed bag, the 1998 original remains the finest non-2D work to date.

The pioneering *Sonic Adventure* was directed by Takashi Iizuka, the man responsible for the level design of *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, who subsequently rose through the ranks of Sonic Team as Yuji Naka took to a more hands-off role. Tellingly, Iizuka pinpoints 1996 – the year of *Super Mario 64*, *Tomb Raider*, and *NiGHTS* – as the year he began work on what eventually became *Sonic Adventure*. "It all started when I mentioned that I wanted to create a Sonic action game where you could play and enjoy the story together," he recalls. "At that time Dreamcast didn't exist and we started to experiment on Sega Saturn. However, as soon as the console prototype was complete, we shifted to Dreamcast."

With the specifications of Sega's newest console still under discussion during *Sonic Adventure*'s pre-production phase, Iizuka had to be careful not to make the game too ambitious but also found that the flagship title gave him some influence over hardware development. "We were working together when Dreamcast was still a prototype," Iizuka recalls, "and had to imagine what form the final CONTINUED >.





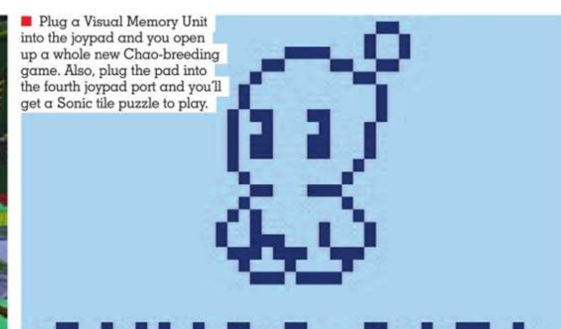
If there's one thing 3D games do better than 2D ones it's over-the-top set pieces that wow the player and get the adrenaline pumping. The very first example of this came in the whale chase at the beginning of *Sonic Adventure*.



I WANTED TO CREATE A SONIC GAME WHERE YOU COULD PLAY AND ENJOY THE STORY







■ Plug a Visual Memory Unit into the joypad and you open up a whole new Chao-breeding game. Also, plug the pad into the fourth joypad port and you'll get a Sonic tile puzzle to play.













■ The snowboarding level is one of the best remembered in Sonic history and made a brilliant comeback in the streets of San Francisco in *Sonic Adventure 2*.



Posted by:
CRAYMEN EDGE
◢ The bit where the killer whale is chasing. Destroying the jetty behind you was jaw-dropping the first time I saw it.

Posted by:
DELBOY84
◢ Easily the best of the 3D Sonic games. Made my jaw drop the first time I saw it in action as I was always more a Sonic than Mario kinda guy. Sadly the series has been declining ever since....

Posted by:
-JAY-
◢ Brilliant game, not so brilliant QA. A few more months of development to iron out the bugs and people would discuss *Sonic Adventure* in the same way they talk about *Mario 64* I reckon. The set pieces were eye-popping for the time.

Posted by:
RAPIDMOLLUSC
◢ First game I bought for my import DC and loved it. Didn't understand a word of what was said, so the fact he spoke was irrelevant to me. Hell, I even had fun creating/breeding Chaos and racing them... after all, everyone wanted a little Black Devil one.

Posted by:
RIVAONI
◢ As with *Sonic Adventure 2*, loved Sonic's bits, couldn't stand the rest. Favourite level was the city one at night, can't remember its name, but I remember getting into a bit of a competition with a mate to try and get the best time on it.

Posted by:
SURLY
◢ I remember getting my Dreamcast around launch and a line my mum came out with on the day I first played it always seemed to stick with me: "Oh look, he leaves footprints in the sand." I'm telling you, that game was epic.





■ Sonic and Tails ride into the danger zone in one of *Sonic Adventure's* best cut-scenes.

What They Said...



The sheer size of the game is awesome and you can find new things about each stage each time you play. There's so much to Sonic Adventure that you'll never get bored

Dreamcast Magazine, Issue 1



game would take, such as how many polygons we could use and how fast processing would be. Of course, there were times when we had to restart from scratch. However, with the hardware still in development I think it was a merit for the *Sonic Adventure* team as we could send requests to the hardware side. The analogue stick was developed as per our request from the software development side. In Sonic's 3D game, where things change dynamically, the analogue input was a requirement. The VMU, however, was a suggestion from the hardware development side. Although it was small, being able to carry a device with a monitor was an interesting idea so we used it for nurturing the Chao in *Sonic Adventure*."



TAKASHI IIZUKA
Director

Despite Sonic Team's late start, truly 3D games were still in their infancy around the mid- to late-Nineties and Iizuka was aware of the form's limitations. "At that time, 3D action games still had problems," he explains. "Regardless of the merit of being able to walk in 360 degrees, it had created a difficulty in gameplay as users did not know where to go. So, in *Sonic Adventure*, without losing where the destination is in 3D, we aimed to create an exhilarating game that would provide players with a sense of 2D action. The dynamic changes of the camera system were integral to this motive so we had a huge trial-and-error process to make them work."

Using these techniques, Sonic Team was able to transform the rollercoaster gameplay of Mega Drive Sonic into 3D quite successfully, yet Iizuka wanted *Sonic Adventure* to be more than just a pure platformer. "During the planning stage, we had been calling the game *Sonic RPG*. That's how much we had been aiming to make an action game where stories progress through adventures around the world." Sega didn't just want to create a sequel, it wanted to expand the Sonic universe, giving players the opportunity to explore the fictional world and get to know it in a way that was not possible in the 2D games. To realise such ambition, *Sonic Adventure* needed a landscape that players would want to explore and so Sonic Team set about creating a series of rich tropical environments for which it took inspiration from real-world locations.

"When we completed the original plan and story outline, six team members went to see the ancient ruins in Latin America," recalls Iizuka. "Travelling through countries such as Cancun in Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru we visited the famous Maya and Inca ruins. We did not have the internet at that time so we had almost no information about the locations. However, in order to create a 3D environment, we had to see them for real so we could make full use of them for 3D model textures. Of all the places we visited, the Tikal ruin in Guatemala and Machu Picchu in Peru had the greatest influence on *Sonic Adventure*."

For the player to fully experience each of these rich virtual environments, Iizuka hit upon the idea of multiple playable characters, each with their own unique gameplay characteristics. While Sonic provided the fast, furious gameplay we all expected, his host of friends could be used to see the world from several different angles. Tails, for example, could fly to previously inaccessible places while Knuckles could climb most walls to reach the heights that Sonic couldn't. "We wanted to make full use of the 3D play field with various types of gameplay," explains Iizuka, "which is what inspired the whole idea of having multiple characters. And the characters were designed around the movements and abilities we needed them to have."

Though most of these additional characters were sourced from previous entries in the Sonic series, two new characters were designed to fit the gameplay that Sonic Team had in mind. The first was E102 Gamma, a flying robot who could lock on and shoot multiple enemies at once, transforming the game into a score-

>. A Character Evolution



Sonic Adventure saw Sonic overhauled for a new generation. Less tubby than before, his super speed seemed more plausible.



The redesigns continued post-*Adventure*, with Sonic becoming even skinnier and more cool. Yet somehow less lovable.





Re-release Adventure



■ FOLLOWING SEGA'S painful but inevitable decision to abandon Dreamcast and become a third-party publisher in 2001, *Sonic Adventure* was re-released as a special edition on PC and GameCube in 2003. Dubbed *Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut*, the re-release offered enhanced graphics and sound, as well as a new Mission mode: 60 different mini-objectives that allow the player to unlock bonus items, including 12 playable Game Gear Sonic titles. In addition, the GameCube version made use of the console's GBA connectivity so players could enjoy Chao nurturing on the go or transfer their Chaos to a copy of *Sonic Advance*, *Sonic Advance 2* or *Sonic Pinball Party*. Compared to the Dreamcast original, the re-releases generally received lower scores from the press, but this critical shift can largely be attributed to rising expectations between one generation and another.

attack target game. The second character, meanwhile, was envisioned to realise a fishing adventure and became Big the Cat, one of the least popular Sonic characters with gamers but a real hit with Iizuka himself. "In comparison to the others, Big does look peculiar," he says, "but he is one of my favourite characters so I have had him appear in several other videogames since."

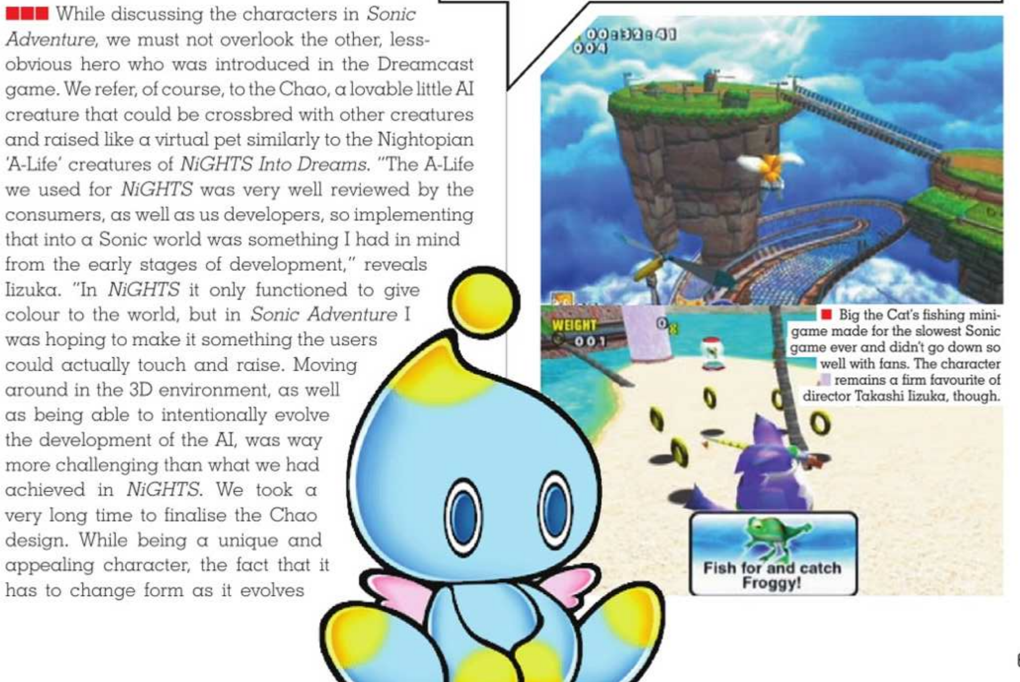
Sonic himself received the biggest facelift since his 1991 debut. Yuji Uekawa's new design discarded Sonic's podgy frame in favour of a slimline look befitting his speed. Quite unexpectedly, Sonic also found a voice. "We had a lot of mixed reactions when we first decided to make Sonic talk. Of course, no one knew how he should sound at the time, so we took a long time to choose the perfect voice everyone agreed on. We gathered various samples and I recall continuous discussions with Mr Naka and the team members. However, what we were looking for was clear. We all agreed on Sonic's simple and cool attitude, so that was one part where our opinions stayed constant and never collapsed." After several auditions, the role went to Ryan Drummond, an actor whose previous experience amounted to one-off appearances in television shows such as *Baywatch*, but who has gone on to enjoy several starring voice roles following his breakthrough as Sonic.

■■■ While discussing the characters in *Sonic Adventure*, we must not overlook the other, less-obvious hero who was introduced in the Dreamcast game. We refer, of course, to the Chao, a lovable little AI creature that could be crossbred with other creatures and raised like a virtual pet similarly to the Nightopian 'A-Life' creatures of *NiGHTS Into Dreams*. "The A-Life we used for *NiGHTS* was very well reviewed by the consumers, as well as us developers, so implementing that into a Sonic world was something I had in mind from the early stages of development," reveals Iizuka. "In *NiGHTS* it only functioned to give colour to the world, but in *Sonic Adventure* I was hoping to make it something the users could actually touch and raise. Moving around in the 3D environment, as well as being able to intentionally evolve the development of the AI, was way more challenging than what we had achieved in *NiGHTS*. We took a very long time to finalise the Chao design. While being a unique and appealing character, the fact that it has to change form as it evolves meant we also had to make the design as simple as possible. These points actually did contradict each other, but we felt that both features were necessary."

After nearly three years of inventive design and development, *Sonic Adventure* launched in Japan in December 1998, followed by a US and European release around nine months later. Despite an initial print run of faulty discs in the US, the game received critical applause, many admiring the sheer scale of the game and the way it retained and expanded upon the essence of Sonic without simply imitating *Super Mario 64*. And though Dreamcast failed as a commercial gaming platform, *Sonic Adventure* remained one of its brightest stars, selling more than 2 million copies and spawning an equally successful sequel – a relief for Iizuka and the rest of Sonic Team, who had invested so much time and effort in creating the first real 3D Sonic title.

"We had a lot of strain on the work, more than we had expected," comments Iizuka. "We had to develop six titles' worth of different action games, as well as six sequences of computer-generated cut-scenes for each character, so there was an unbelievable amount of work. The game size was always expected to be very big, right from the pre-production phase, and there were times when we thought of reducing the size along the way, but we finally managed to create the game we had hoped for and wanted to create from the beginning. Because of the team's hard work, we ended up with a very satisfying game filled with rich variety."

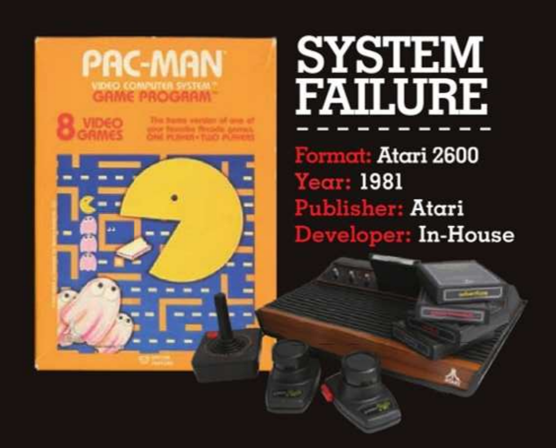
ALTHOUGH BEING 3D DOES HAVE ITS MERITS, USERS DID NOT KNOW WHERE TO GO



■ Big the Cat's fishing mini-game made for the slowest Sonic game ever and didn't go down so well with fans. The character remains a firm favourite of director Takashi Iizuka, though.

CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing console ports under the spotlight

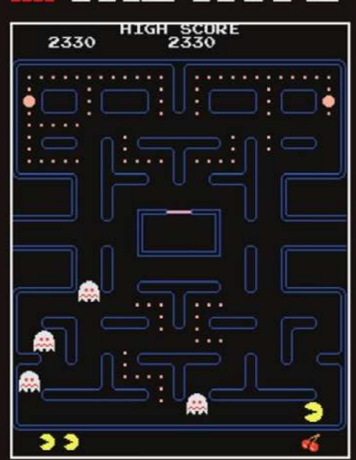


SYSTEM FAILURE

Format: Atari 2600
Year: 1981
Publisher: Atari
Developer: In-House

PAC-MAN

THE HYPE



WHEN PAC-MAN first appeared in the arcades, chip shops and Launderettes of the world in 1980, it built upon a global phenomenon that started with *Pong* and *Space Invaders* and boosted the popularity of videogames to an unprecedented level. Not only was *Pac-Man* a brilliantly original and playable arcade game, but it was also the first to use a recognisable and memorable character. That simple yellow blob became a superstar overnight and spawned an extremely lucrative merchandise industry in the process. As with other hot arcade properties of the time, the rights to the home conversion were fiercely contested and it was Atari that eventually won out, the publisher producing all of the initial conversions including the Intellivision port. Surely, under such an arrangement the Atari console release would be among the best available…

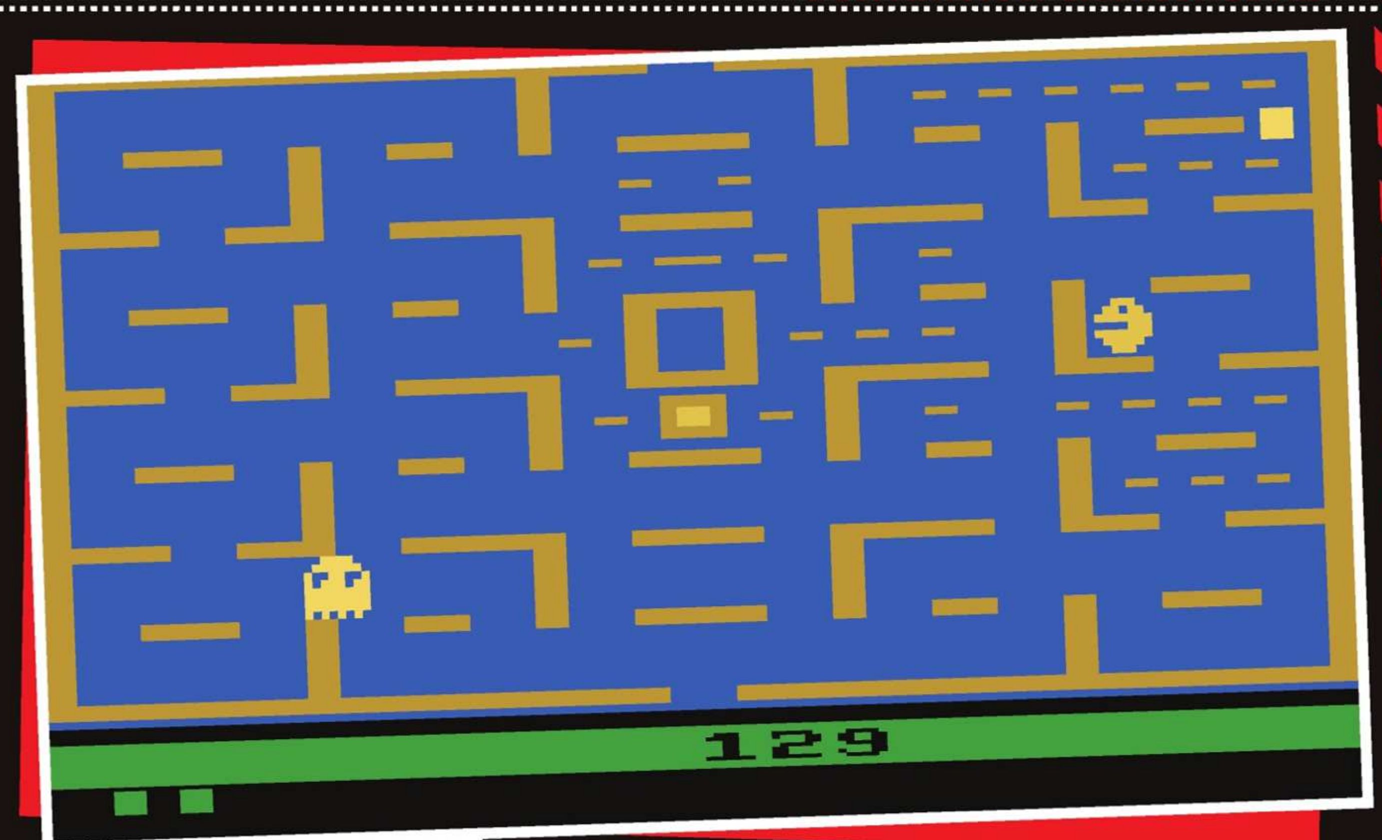
THE WARNING SIGNS

Is it us, or are those ghosts painted into the screenshot? Now, why would Atari go and do a thing like that?

Are these levels really designed for young children, or are they just so simple that they have to be marketed that way?



"Video wafers"?! Since when did Pac-Man eat video wafers? Has this been written just to explain the now-rectangular dots?



THE REALITY

Pac-Man's static level design, simple controls and limited number of moving sprites suggest that it must be a game that any machine could simulate with a high degree of accuracy. The Atari 2600 port, however, proves that that's far from the case. The maze looks nothing like the original. The ghosts look wrong. Pac-Man looks wrong. And the music is wrong. Everything is wrong, wrong, wrong. The ghosts flicker like they're communicating in Morse code, and Pac-Man doesn't turn to go around corners. In fairness to the designer, there are technical hurdles in the 2600 that explain all of this away. The console, for example, should only be capable of displaying one moving sprite at once, which actually makes this conversion something of a miracle. But that doesn't make it something you'd actually want to play.

1 There are actually four ghosts on screen, but they flicker so much that the game only displays one at a time, making it impossible to take representative screenshots. Still images cannot convey how irritating this constant flicker is.

2 While Atari managed to get both Pac-Man's chomping and death animations just so, they forgot one crucial point. Whenever he turns a corner he should physically turn to face up or down, but in this game he simply floats sideways.

3 Remember the fruits that occasionally appear in the centre of the maze to be collected for bonus points? Atari managed to get them into the conversion, but we have no idea what type of fruit this is supposed to be.

What You Should Have Played It On



Officially released by Namco, the 1984 Famicom version of *Pac-Man* was extremely close to the real thing and made the 2600 port look almost laughable by comparison. Sadly, the deal with Atari meant that the US NES release was delayed until 1990. Boo!



ACTIVISIONARIES

Earlier this year Activision merged with Vivendi and instantly became the biggest, most powerful third-party videogame publisher in the world for the second time in its existence. The first time around it was the biggest by default, as its founding fathers explain…

"In the late-Seventies Atari was at a crossroads, trying to become a big business and maintain a small-company atmosphere," reveals designer David Crane. "Middle management, who worked day-to-day with the people responsible for the success of the products, recognised the value of the employees. Upper management, however, treated games as widgets and the creative staff as replaceable drones. One group made promises; the other group broke them. Morale had hit rock bottom.

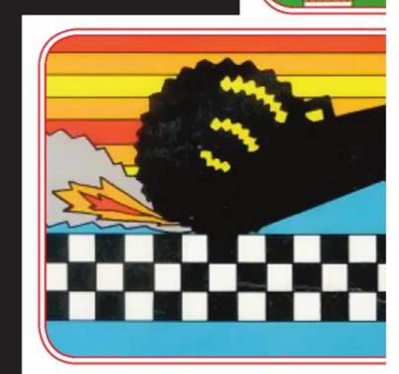
"At the same time, a memo was circulated from marketing showing the sales figures for videogame cartridges for the previous year, by per cent of sales. Their intention was to show what people were buying so that we in the design group would 'make more games like these'. Dissecting this memo at lunch with three friends it became clear that we four designers were responsible for 60 per cent of Atari's $100 million game cartridge sales for the year. Yes, four guys, making $30K per year, designed products that made the company over $60 million.

"We went to management, not looking for much, but hoping for recognition and a little extra money. When we got in to see the president, we were told that we were 'no more important to the company than the guy on the assembly line who puts them in the box'."

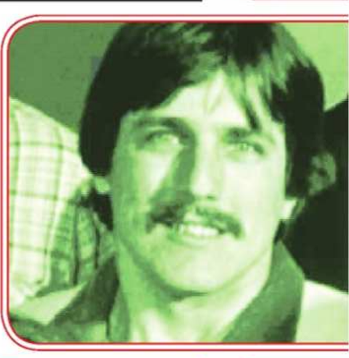
Those four guys were Crane, Alan Miller, Larry Kaplan and Bob Whitehead. Names that should be familiar to any retro game fan now, but were unheard of in 1979 despite having worked on several popular Atari games such as *Air-Sea Battle* and *Canyon Bomber*. "I wanted to be recognised for my work, to receive credit for it," remembers Miller some 30 years after the event. "Atari had been acquired by Warner Bros in late-1976, a few months before I joined the company. We thought that surely, as a part of one of the world's largest record and book publishers and television and movie producers, they'd understand the need to recognise artists for their contribution, and compensate them accordingly. It turned out we were very wrong about that."

In June 1979, the four game designers met in secrecy with Jim Levy, a record-industry executive who, as it turned out, had already formulated a business plan for financing an independent software company. "After a series of meetings over a few weeks, I agreed to revise my business plan to position the company as a producer of Atari-compatible videogames that would eventually expand into other forms of game and personal computer software, and the boys agreed to become the core design team for the company," explains Levy. "I re-wrote the plan during the month of July, introduced the design team to my financial backers in early-August, and secured an agreement for financing in late-August. The fundamental agreement between the boys and me was that they would create the games and I would build the company. And that's pretty much what we did."

ATARI WAS TRYING TO BECOME A BIG BUSINESS AND MAINTAIN A SMALL-COMPANY ATMOSPHERE









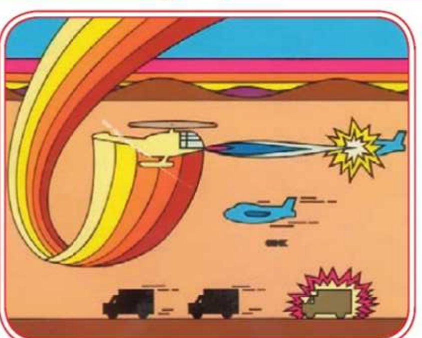
THE COMPANY WAS incorporated on 1 October 1979 and was branded as Activision: a name coined by Levy himself, slyly and rather famously constructed so that it would appear before Atari in any alphabetical listings. The designers got the credit they were looking for and set about to create what would become some of the most famous videogames of all time. But this breakthrough did not come without a cost, as the designers reveal.

Levy had been introduced to the creative team through a lawyer working for Miller, who apparently believes such legal assistance to be both a blessing and a curse. "Ever since then I've had CONTINUED >.





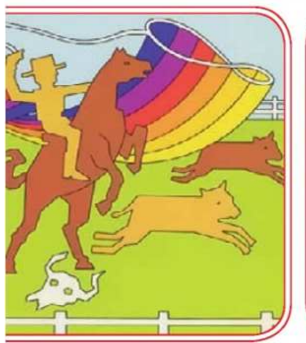


POLICE







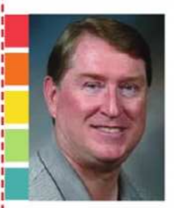


Games With Vision

The best games from Activision's classic period

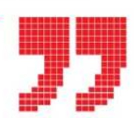
Where Are They Now?

ALAN MILLER



I WAS approached in 2007 by Steve Cartwright, one of the early Activision designers, about starting an online virtual world for young children. Steve had a great concept for the site, far beyond the vision of the leader in the category, Club Penguin, but very straightforward to implement. It also incorporated educational aspects, with which I had a lot of experience. We started development, but I knew we were going to encounter problems when, later in 2007, Disney bought Club Penguin for a reported $700 million. The category was flooded with similar ventures and we were simply too late to get the funding we needed to go from prototype to market launch. I ended that effort in early-2008 and am now looking for my next venture.

I'm also a member of the Free 2 Play Forum. I believe that games that are free to gamers will play a huge role in the future of the industry. Designers and publishers need to sort out the details of how free-to-play games will be adequately monetised; by advertising, by the purchase of virtual goods, or through some other mechanism.





PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS

Year: 1984 Designer: David Crane

David Crane believes sequels are a great way of testing new ideas without risk, and *Pitfall II* attests to that. More ambitious than the first game, the multiple levels and jaw-dropping water effects made the 2600 sing in ways we never thought possible.



GHOSTBUSTERS

Year: 1984 Designer: David Crane

Though it began life as another game entirely, *Ghostbusters* suited the licence and remains one of the best game-to-movie adaptations. Ecto-1, the Marshmallow Man, even the lyrics to the theme tune. It was all here and was great fun to play.



KABOOM!

Year: 1981 Designer: Larry Kaplan

This unofficial remake of Atari's 1978 arcade game *Avalanche* recalls many of the Game & Watch titles for its simple premise and addictive gameplay. As enjoyable as the comparison suggests, *Kaboom!* is one of the best one-more-go games on Atari 2600.



ALTER EGO

Year: 1986 Designer: Peter J Favaro

Alter Ego game puts you in control of a human being and tasks you with controlling a condensed version of their life from birth to death. Designed by a professional psychologist, it shows how the decisions we make in our youth can affect us up until old age.



RIVER RAID

Year: 1982 Designer: Carol Shaw

Way before its time, *River Raid* tinkered with the formula of vertical shoot-'em-ups decades before the likes of *Psyvariar* or *Ikaruga*. Forcing your fuel to deplete as you fly around, you must prioritise between kills and refuelling. A remake is overdue.



LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE

Year: 1985 Designer: David Crane, Rich Gold

A primitive version of *The Sims*, *Little Computer People* allowed you to view the life of a digital man and his dog. Interaction was limited and the man often ignored text prompts, but in 1985 these faults could be accepted in favour of the technically impressive illusion.

much more involvement with attorneys than I ever wanted," he says. "But that's just a necessary part of the equation of doing business in the US. Generally speaking, it was the beginning of a shift for me from actual programming to technical management and then to corporate management."

Crane also had to change the way he did business, making significant sacrifices in the process. "Activision was a true start-up. You begin by personally buying into the company to help fund operations, and then cut your salary by 30 per cent. Then forego any personal life and start working until midnight every day. That will give you a sense of how your life is changed by starting a company. I couldn't afford gas, so I walked a mile each way to work. Not through the driving snow but, yes, at midnight most nights. And I learned that a can of tuna could make three brown-bag meals. When you try this for yourself, and you discover that you are having more fun than at any job you ever had, then you know you made the right career decision. As hard as the work was, it was intensely rewarding and life-altering. Then once it became financially rewarding as well, it couldn't have been better."

The original Activision team assemble for a group shot in 1979.

MUCH OF THE reward from Activision was the ability to credit each designer for his own game, a desire Jim Levy understood from his experience in the music business. "Activision was actually more similar for me to the music and publishing industries, of which I had been a part, than it was for the Atari guys, who were treated as engineers without creative standing at Atari. As we were putting the company together, I listened closely to the four guys as they complained about the way Atari was run, and knew, from my experience in other creative industries, that it did not have to be that way. So, from the start, Activision was a place of enormous creative and entrepreneurial energy, where a heterogeneous mix of diverse talent came together and where each was respected for what they contributed to the company, no matter how 'different' they might have seemed."

As much as each programmer craved authorial recognition, however, both Miller and Crane agree that it was consumers who benefited most from the shift. "It really changed the way gamers identified with the games," says Miller. "It became very personal to them, similar to they way people respond to musicians and authors." "We each had our own unique style," adds Crane, "and as more games hit the market, it was nice to know you could count on a particular designer." "And the gamers responded," adds Miller. "Between 1982 and 1983, we were receiving ten thousand fan letters a week from gamers of all ages. We had to maintain a staff of 20-25 people just to respond to them."

AS HARD AS THE WORK WAS, IT WAS INTENSELY REWARDING AND LIFE-ALTERING

Not everyone was as enthralled by Activision's existence as the gamers, however. Until 1979, Atari had enjoyed a 100 per cent market share of 2600's software catalogue sales, but all that was about to change and even newer console manufacturers like Coleco and Mattel didn't seem prepared despite the fact that more quality software would help their businesses grow. "The early videogame companies never got to grips with third-party publishers," agrees Crane. "I have to believe that someone in the organisations had the foresight to see the benefits, but that was never apparent in their official actions. CONTINUED >.







Are all movie licences rubbish? Activision proved very early on that they can definitely be great games.



Jim Levy, presumably getting into the Wild West spirit before work began on Activision's *Stampede*.

BRAND VISION

ONE OF Activision's less-obvious strengths was the way every game could be identified as an Activision product from its appearance. This went further than just slapping the company logo on the box; the Activision insignia, designed by Jim Levy, actually appeared on your TV set as you played the game too, constantly reminding you of its origin and forcing you to associate the company with the quality you were experiencing. Each Activision game's packaging was completely recognisable, with every piece of box art being drawn in the same rainbow style. The company even gave away special fabric patches, using the same iconography, to those who achieved high scores in their games. The look didn't last forever, but it was used long enough to establish an identity for the company's products, and remains some of the most iconic imagery in the world of videogames. Some collectors will not stop until they have each and every one of those imaginatively designed boxes and the similarly envisioned promotional material that went with them.



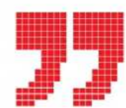
Where Are They Now?

DAVID CRANE



SINCE 1995 I have been designing browser-based games. I started Skyworks with Garry Kitchen (*Donkey Kong*, *Keystone Kapers*, and many others). We identified the internet as the next gaming platform, and found it well suited to our skills. We both still prefer working on smaller, more intimate and casual games than massive multi-man-year projects. Browser-based games tend to reach players who enjoy a more casual gaming experience – just like the games I made for the whole family in the Eighties.

I spend every day the same way I have since 1977 – at a computer, programming videogames. I am the only game guy from that Seventies era to have done this continuously since then. Due to my longevity I am coming to be known as the Charles Schultz of the videogame business. Mr Shultz personally drew his Peanuts characters for 50 years. I have passed 30 years and continue to do it every day.



They acted on the belief that any game cartridge sold by another publisher to play on their machine took money out of their pocket."

"Atari sued us just a couple of months before our first product release," reveals Levy. "However, we had done our legal homework and were able to respond and ultimately settle that lawsuit without any real effect on the company."

By 1982, the question of whether third parties were valuable to platform holders became irrelevant. New 2600 publishers like Imagic and Parker Brothers followed Activision's lead, creating many of the console's defining titles. Activision also made a number of its own achievements with a line-up of games that are still adored today. *Pitfall!*, *H.E.R.O.*, *Kaboom!*, *River Raid* and many more sold millions of copies and were excellent games too. Such success showed very clearly that the industry needed third parties in order to thrive.



ATARI SUED US JUST A COUPLE OF MONTHS BEFORE OUR FIRST PRODUCT RELEASE

IN THE YEARS following 1983's Videogame Crash (see **games™** issue 70), it was those companies most open to the idea of third parties that were able to survive, and as the old guard of 2600s and Colecovisions died off it was the home computers that took their place – at least until the SNES arrived in 1985. Using open architecture and data storage that any developer could freely use, as well as giving people the tools to create their own games, home computers like Commodore 64 were the perfect breeding ground for many of the third-party publishers that exist today. The unstoppable Electronic Arts got its break on Commodore 64, and Activision was also well poised to take advantage of the new hardware.

"In my original business plan, I envisioned the long-term growth of computers in the home as a major new industry for which a software industry would develop as hardware ownership grew," says Levy. "We planned an orderly transition into home computer software by 1984," adds Crane. But 1984 was clearly a bit late and though Activision enjoyed success on C64 with Crane's own *Ghostbusters* and *Little Computer People* it couldn't completely make the transition across from consoles before the market crash made a dent in their business.

The Videogame Crash had serious consequences for the founding members of Activision. Levy explains: "During the 1986 recovery of the company from the industry mess of 1983-85, a couple of members of the



Smoke And Mirrors

Was Atari really as hedonistic as its reputation suggests?

"The days of lobby hot-tub parties and clouds of marijuana smoke billowing out of offices were gone before I joined Atari," says Crane. "Atari's working environment was like most engineering companies: cubicles with computer terminals and game system emulators. At Activision we used a similar arrangement, but we learned a better cubicle arrangement… We realised that much of the quality of our games came from the combined expertise of our group. We set up an open lab environment – now known as the bullpen – where each designer had a cubicle surrounding an open common area. Anything on the screen was fair game for comment… Every game benefited from the experience in the room."

"I never observed any 'hedonistic' activities at Atari," insists Miller. "People in the engineering group worked very hard. It's true that it was a casual environment and the kind of clothes you wore was not important in the engineering group. Results were what counted.

"There's a misconception that drug use was common at Atari. It wasn't. I worked at Atari between 1977 and 1979 and never saw any illegal drugs used on the premises. It was the same at Activision and Accolade. I observed no illegal drug use in any of these companies, although it was easy to find everywhere else in the San Francisco Bay Area."





Activision's very first game was *Dragster*. Though it's not as well remembered as others it's still a fun two-player racer.



Alan Miller and David Crane at the Game Developers Choice Awards.

board and I differed at times on certain management issues, which ultimately led to my decision to resign from the company in early-1987 to allow these directors to take the company in the direction they wanted to go."

He wasn't the only one to leave. Seeing the board's reluctance to move completely onto home computers as a mistake, Bob Whitehead and Alan Miller left to form their own company, Accolade, to concentrate solely on computer games. By 1994 the new firm had grown its annual sales revenue to $40 million. Crane stayed on out of loyalty to the company he helped build, and created a few more classics in this period, but eventually he walked too. "The new management team had neither the skills nor the experience to get the company through the tough times," he laments.

ACTIVISION MANAGED to limp on without its visionary founders, but it didn't get far, as Crane points out. "Activision was once the biggest name in games. But with the management change of the mid-Eighties, the company lost sight of the value of the name and its historic position in the industry."

Miller continues: "Around 1990, when Accolade was successful and Activision was struggling, we negotiated with the largest shareholder of Activision to purchase a controlling interest in the company. We felt there was a lot of brand equity in the name Activision – even though it had formally changed the company name to Mediagenic – as well as ongoing value in the game properties. We were very close to completing that deal, but we ultimately backed away. Activision was just bleeding too much red ink."

18 years on and Activision is still around of course, but as Crane quite rightly points out, it is not the same company that he founded back in 1979. With poor decision after poor decision, the company made its inevitable slide into bankruptcy, and there was nothing left of the company but the name. Bobby Kotick came along and bought the company for a few hundred thousand dollars. But what he was really buying was a brand name – and that brand name was worth an estimated $50 million.

After the purchase, the company offices in Silicon Valley were closed, the assets auctioned, and all employees laid off. The new owner opened a new office in southern California and proceeded to start a new videogame company." It's been around two decades since Crane, Miller and Levy were involved with Activision, but it is clear that all three still hold the company in high regard, despite the troublesome Mediagenic years. Alan Miller summarises: "Over the last 15 or so years, Kotick and the rest of the people at Activision have done a great job of growing that company from a very weakened state to an immensely important game publisher. With its announced merger with Vivendi's game group, Activision will post over $3 billion in annual sales. And it goes without saying that it's created some extremely popular games."

But would Activision be the powerhouse it is today if four guys from Atari and an imaginative outsider hadn't laid the foundations of the industry to begin with? We don't think so, and neither does Jim Levy. "We at Activision always thought of the industry as a long-term growth industry that ultimately would achieve what it has today. There have been times over the years when the larger business world doubted this, but we never did. Obviously, I am pleased to see an industry today that looks a lot like what I wrote about almost 30 years ago in the original Activision business plan."

Where Are They Now?

JIM LEVY



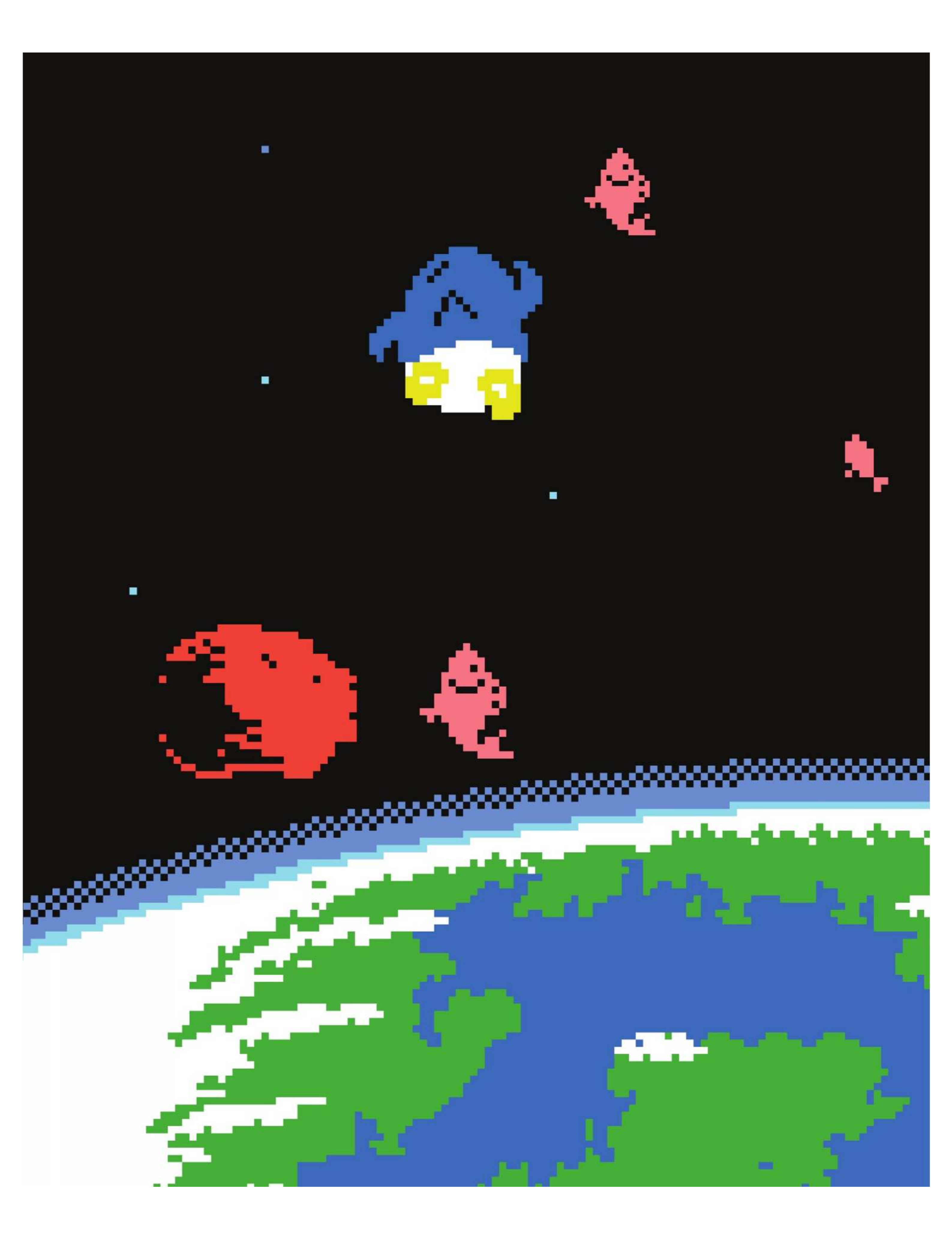
"I am mostly retired today but still have my hand in a number of projects, some for profit and some not. I live now in Sonoma, California, about one and a half hours north of Silicon Valley, but still visit there frequently and assist new companies in their development… none in the game industry at this time."

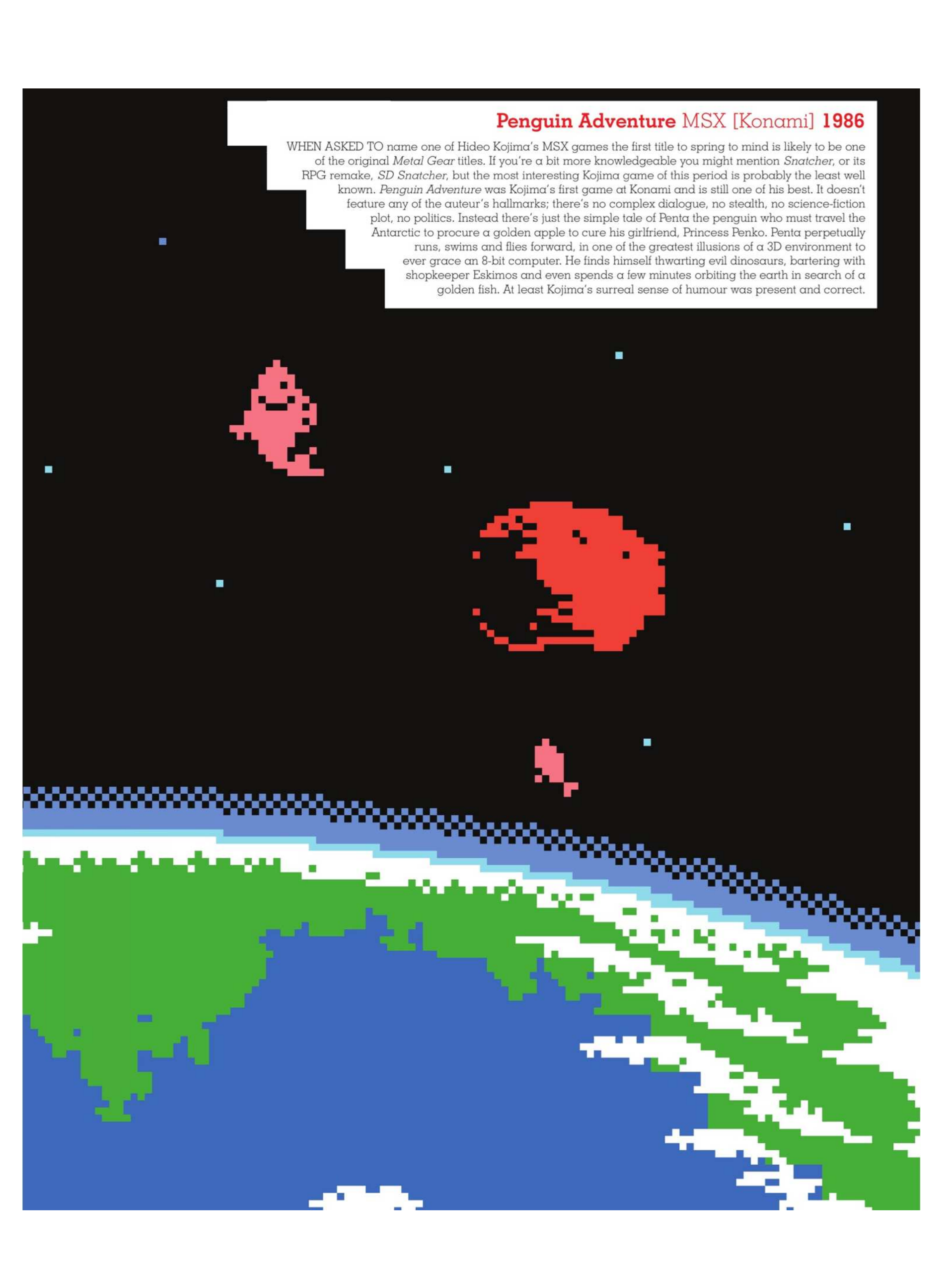


H.E.R.O. was one of Activision's most popular classic games and was converted from the 2600 to several other 8-bit formats.



Jim Levy with Cliff Crowder at an Activision reunion in 1996.





Penguin Adventure MSX [Konami] **1986**

WHEN ASKED TO name one of Hideo Kojima's MSX games the first title to spring to mind is likely to be one of the original *Metal Gear* titles. If you're a bit more knowledgeable you might mention *Snatcher*, or its RPG remake, *SD Snatcher*, but the most interesting Kojima game of this period is probably the least well known. *Penguin Adventure* was Kojima's first game at Konami and is still one of his best. It doesn't feature any of the auteur's hallmarks; there's no complex dialogue, no stealth, no science-fiction plot, no politics. Instead there's just the simple tale of Penta the penguin who must travel the Antarctic to procure a golden apple to cure his girlfriend, Princess Penko. Penta perpetually runs, swims and flies forward, in one of the greatest illusions of a 3D environment to ever grace an 8-bit computer. He finds himself thwarting evil dinosaurs, bartering with shopkeeper Eskimos and even spends a few minutes orbiting the earth in search of a golden fish. At least Kojima's surreal sense of humour was present and correct.

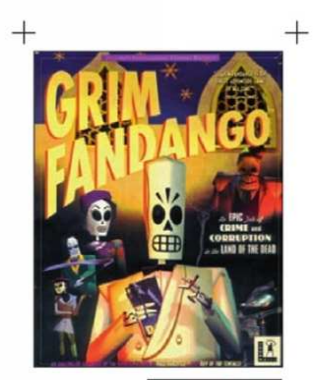




BEHIND THE SCENES

GRIM FANDANGO

As Tim Schafer readies the release of Brütal Legend, games™ quizzes him about the adventure that put him on the map



Released: 1998
Format: PC
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: In-House

KEY STAFF:
Tim Schafer
Project Leader
Peter Chan
Concept Artist
Peter Tsaykel
Lead Artist
Peter McConnell
Composer

THERE HAS BEEN a significantly tedious amount of quarrelling over the topic of games as art, all of which has led to a torrent of unreadable blog posts, the occasional academic dissertation, and lots of swearing and exclamation marks. Henry Jenkins, Clive Barker, Greg Costikyan, and other men with facial hair (oh, and Roger Ebert) have weighed in on the debate and proved, ultimately, conclusively, that this is a song that will never end – at least not until it's settled in the Circle of Death (Kritik Kombat). So we propose a new and hopefully somewhat less contentious idea: art as games. No longer will we bicker over whether *Gears Of War* deserves a pedestal next to *Psyche Revived By Cupid's Kiss*. Instead we will examine how the social, emotional, and historical value of traditional art can be heightened, or at least better understood, by placing the art in an interactive context. Which brings us, rather seamlessly, to *Grim Fandango*.

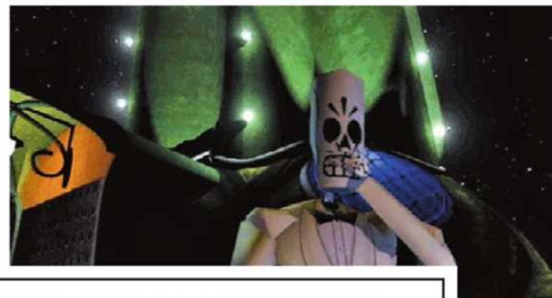
Before we go on, though, Tim Schafer, DoubleFine wheel and *Grim*'s project leader, wants a word. Much as he loves the game – it's certainly the one he talks most about from his LucasArts days – he's eager to clarify that it was never intended as an artistic statement. "People always talk about how I've chosen maybe to do something more arty over the commercial stuff," he says, perhaps concerned about future publishing deals, "but every game I've worked on has been a direct attempt to reach a broader audience, or maybe even sell out. And *Grim Fandango* had the biggest one of all, which was abandoning 2D graphics. We'd worked on 2D for so long, and then I was, like, okay, we're going 3D because it's so hot right now."

While *Grim* may have courted the technological mainstream, the game's entirely bizarre premise lends a lot CONTINUED >.

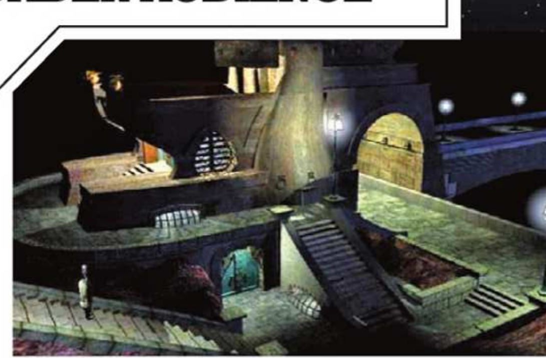


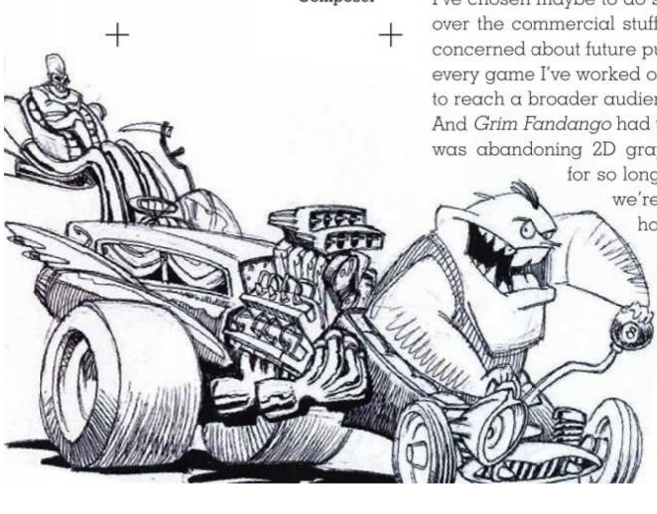


One of the most surprising things about the Land of the Dead is that life there can be just as mundane as your own mortal existence.



EVERY GAME I WORK ON IS A DIRECT ATTEMPT TO REACH A BROADER AUDIENCE









The notion of unrequited love between dead people is certainly an original one, but it may also have alienated a major chunk of *Grim Fandango*'s target audience.



FROM THE FORUM

Posted by: BOB SYKO

My opinion is that they should hurry up and release it on XBLA so I can play it.

Posted by: SKEV

This was the first point-and-click adventure game I ever played and I sucked at it. During all this sucking, however, I was blown away by the detail and the characters. Really want to play it again.

Posted by: SHERAK

Grim Fandango could be one of the greatest games I have ever played, but I don't consider it or remember it like a game, to be honest. When I think back, I seem to remember it as I would remember a fantastic film. The puzzles at times were cruel and had me scouring the net at work on our 32kbps connection, but once I completed it I played it through again so I could absorb the amazing story without the hassle of puzzles. I kinda wish they had just sacked off the game and made a movie instead.

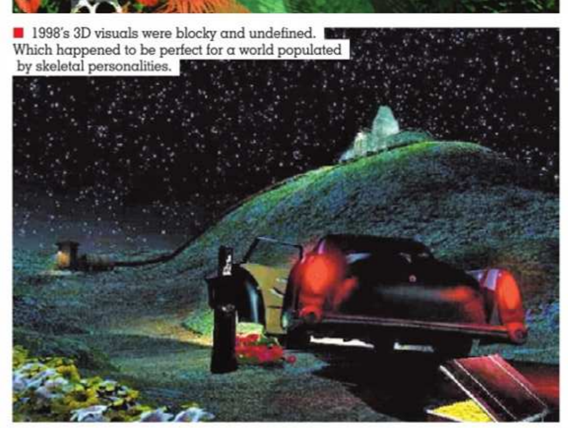
Posted by: BILGE RAT

I never rated this game as highly as the *Monkey Island* series, but it was still an awesome game. The story and puzzles were great and the characters and voice acting was first rate. It is a unique game that can still offer a lot to new players today. It is unfortunate that the jump to 3D left it with slightly dodgy controls. The PC version was also surprisingly buggy, especially the infamous elevator puzzle, which is unsolvable if your processor is too fast.





1998's 3D visuals were blocky and undefined. Which happened to be perfect for a world populated by skeletal personalities.

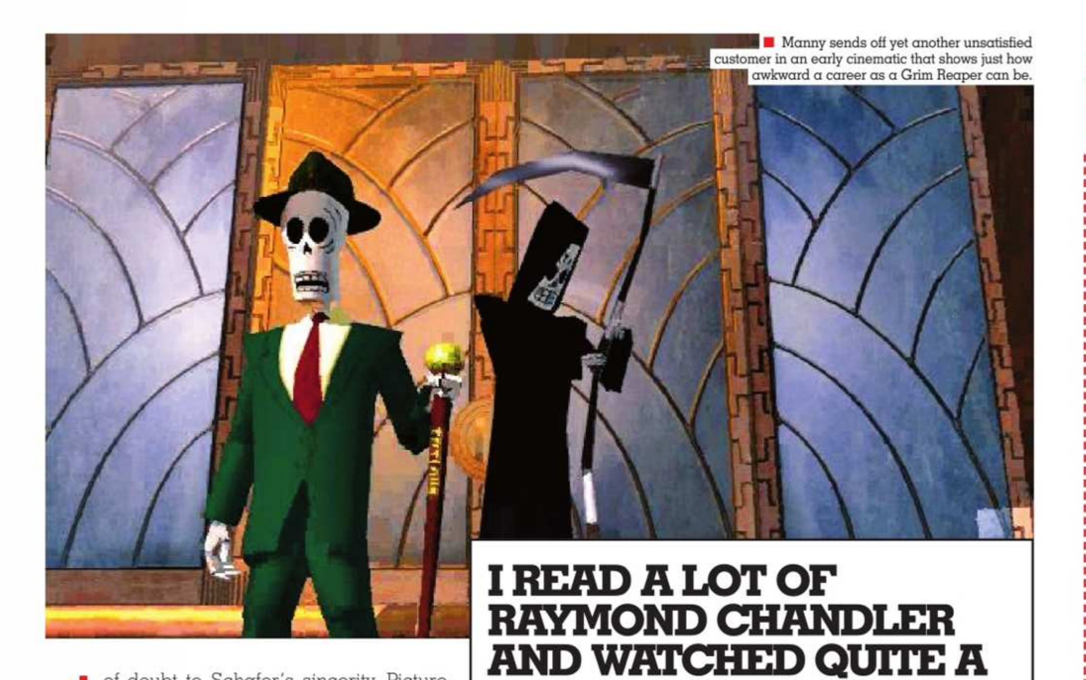






Glottis: janitor, mechanic, demon. He may be cute, but only if you keep him away from the booze.





Manny sends off yet another unsatisfied customer in an early cinematic that shows just how awkward a career as a Grim Reaper can be.

I READ A LOT OF RAYMOND CHANDLER AND WATCHED QUITE A LOT OF FILM NOIR

of doubt to Schafer's sincerity. Picture this, if you will: an interactive love story based on film noir tropes, set in an Art Deco underworld populated by chain-smoking skeletons. In pitch form, it sounds quixotic in the extreme. As an adventure game, though, it blew away all that came before it (and since). *Grim's* perfect synergy of styles – Mexican folklore, *Chinatown*, Sixties hot rods – resulted in something that was unfamiliar and unique, and yet immediately compelling.

The story focuses on one Manuel 'Manny' Calavera, a travel agent in the Department of Death (DOD), who determines in what level of luxury a departed soul is permitted to travel to their final destination, the Ninth Underworld, place of eternal rest. After noticing his recent string of bum jobs – and being threatened with redundancy by his boss, Don Copal – Manny steals a perfect client from his sleazy co-worker (and archrival) Domino Hurley. When he sees that his latest client, the utterly beatific Mercedes 'Meche' Colomar, is only eligible for the cheapest deal (a walking stick and a promise she'll get there in about four years), he begins to suspect foul play, and so begins his epic journey.

'IN MEDIAS RES' is a literary term pertaining to the technique of starting 'in the midst of affairs', or, if you prefer, in the middle of a story. The narrative may begin at the height of a turgid battle, or perhaps just as a spouse announces they're filing for divorce. It's a device that evokes curiosity in the reader. They immediately want to get to know the characters involved and discover how this situation came to pass.

With *Grim*, Schafer went one step further and started at the end of a story. Perhaps even beyond the end: the characters are already dead, and their lives are never revisited or explained. When we first meet Manny, he's left whatever he remembers of his waking years far behind, and we're expected to do the same. It's a game that's wholly about the journey of death – not life – and is all the more mysterious and engaging for it.

"It gives the characters depth," Schafer shrugs. "I'll often write reams of back story for every character, but I'll never reveal that to the player; it just informs the things they do and say. And in their actions, you're given a tiny glimpse into that back story, but you never see it as a whole. We know Manny's been around. We don't exactly know what happened to him, or what he did to end up where he is – a civil servant in the Land of the Dead, which is considered as a sort of punishment – even though he seems okay, so he has a real complexity. He's in a grey area."

Throughout *Grim's* story, the mystery of Señor Calavera remains the game's biggest question mark. Who were his friends? Why does he care so much about doing right by Meche? And of course, how does someone so demonstrably noble and capable end up in one of the least-desirable positions a Land of the Dead citizen could occupy?



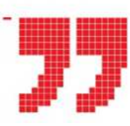
Grim's concept art has a suitably angular, expressionist tone to its lines.





The large cast of characters is unforgettable. Although for the most part they are skeletons in Forties garb, with mask-like faces that can be attributed to Day of the Dead festivities, their personalities render them as distinctive and memorable as members of an extremely diverse cast from any fine film

Computer Games Magazine, September 1998



This isn't to say he's opaque – in fact, he's one of the few adventure game heroes whose motivations and methods make a certain amount of sense – but that the little things you don't know about Manny make him a very intriguing and enjoyable character to play.

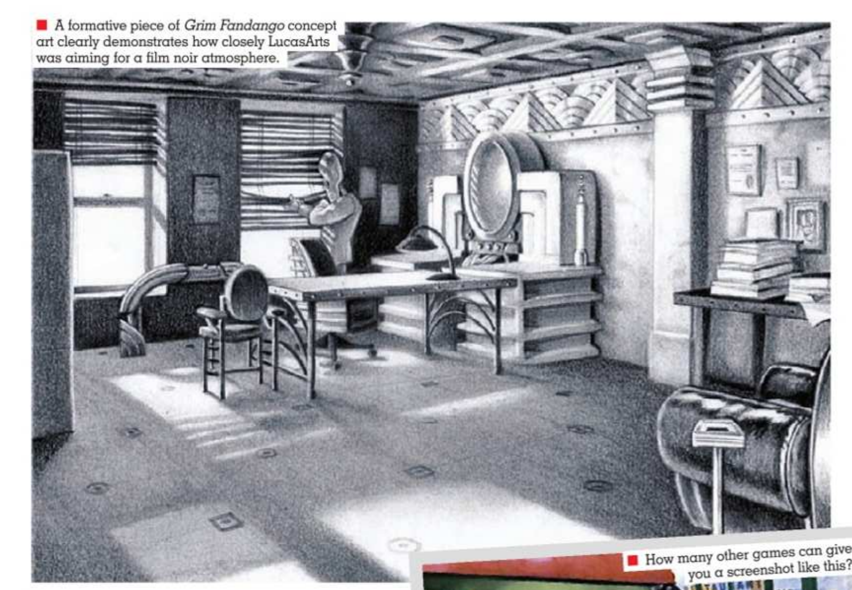
WHERE CALAVERA PIQUES your interest, it's the environments that stun. *BioShock*'s 'daring' use of Art Deco visuals was widely praised, but *Grim* did it years beforehand and arguably to greater effect. From glorious metropolis El Marrow to the grimy port town Rubacava, *Grim* could be enjoyed on a visual level alone, but what truly made Schafer's vision of the Land of the Dead so compelling was how he combined the Twenties architecture with imagery associated with Mexican folklore – more specifically, the festivities involved in the Day of the Dead festival, held annually on 2 November. This wasn't a new obsession for Schafer – in fact, he'd been interested in the festival since college, and planned to do a game about it long before *Grim* actually went into development.

"I did anthropology in college, and we studied Mexican folklore. The festival the Day of the Dead was always a favourite of mine because of the way it was treated. It was this big festival and tourists loved it. It was a big party, but on the other hand, it was also a sombre event. It was about remembering your dead relatives and welcoming them back into your house. And they had these fascinating traditions: they'd put money in the coffin so they'd have money in the Land of the Dead, but they also stuffed extra money in the lining of the coffin, so no one could steal it when they got there."

It was this strange idea that even in the world beyond our own, where souls go to rest, there's a criminal element – that informed a lot of *Grim's* less-scrupulous characters. Well, that and Chandler. "While studying the Mexican folklore," Schafer recalls, "I read a lot of Raymond Chandler and other writers like him, and also watched quite a lot of film noir. No one had combined those elements before. And it just seemed ridiculous to me that even in death you'd have to worry about getting your pockets picked. It made me wonder about the world of crime in the Land of the Dead, and the two just sparked in my head. The idea came, you know, that maybe there was a scam going on down there, exploiting souls on their way to Mictlan, the Ninth Underworld."

Much of the detail behind the ticket scam at the heart of *Grim's* plot was derived from one of Schafer's favourite films, Roman Polanski's latter-day film noir classic *Chinatown*. In that film, private investigator Jake Gittes is hired to spy on the chief engineer of Los Angeles' water department. When he discovers he's been duped by his employer, who claimed to be the engineer's jealous wife, he's immediately faced with a lawsuit and the justifiable desire to uncover how this came to be. The plot, based on the California water wars of the early 20th Century, bears little resemblance to the fraud committed by Hector LeMans and his cronies in *Grim Fandango*, but the structure and atmosphere are instantly recognisable.

In doing this, Schafer took one of the most revered periods in cinematic history (and Polanski's tribute to it), and demonstrated how its central tenets – expressive use of cinematography, emphasis on clever dialogue, and, you know, detectives – could easily mesh with the sleuthing and branching conversations inherent to the graphic adventure genre. In other words, Schafer created one of the most original and engaging works of film noir in recent cinematic CONTINUED >.



A formative piece of *Grim Fandango* concept art clearly demonstrates how closely LucasArts was aiming for a film noir atmosphere.



How many other games can give you a screenshot like this?

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Tim Schafer's tragicomic biker fable *Full Throttle* set the stage for the designer to work on his most ambitious game to date.



After leaving LucasArts to form DoubleFine, in 2005 Schafer created *Psychonauts*. He thought it would be easier. If only he knew…




Some adventure fans may have lamented the switch from 2D, but polygons did have their advantages, including the ability to create scenes of incredible scale. Like this one.

Live And Let Die

LucasArts has been discreetly trying to revive its adventure game franchises since *Escape From Monkey Island* in 2000. *Full Throttle* has seen two separate attempts to its name, both of which were cancelled mid-development due to disputes over the final product and, some suspect, Tim Schafer's absence. Although he'd love to work on a *Full Throttle* sequel, he's profoundly pleased that Lucas's projects never came to fruition. It was his baby, after all. And a *Grim* sequel? Beyond comprehension. "It was built to be a complete experience. There's no sequel. They've gone on to the Ninth Underworld and that's the end."



history, but as a videogame. As a result, whether or not you believe videogames themselves deserve to be considered art, there's little doubt as to *Grim*'s intrinsic artistic value.

Like many of Schafer's games – including the upcoming *Brütal Legend* – *Grim* also draws from his childhood passions. Specifically, Manny's some time sidekick Glottis. A giant, bear-like demon, Glottis is the DOD's janitor when Manny first meets him. Once the player discovers his skill with cars, very soon thereafter, he sets to work on designing an Ed 'Big Daddy' Roth-style hot rod for Manny called the Bonewagon.

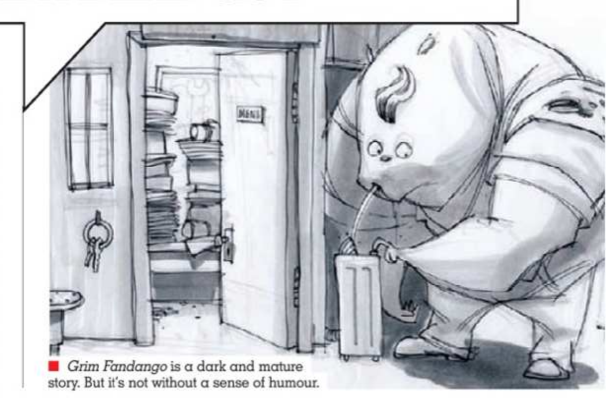
"WHEN I WAS a kid," Schafer laughs, "I just loved Big Daddy's hot rod artwork for Kustom Kulture. They were crazy. And I loved how he'd draw the demons in them. What's amazing is that they actually looked really happy – their tongues were flapping in their mouths, and they had these big, bloodshot eyes. I love that imagery. Interestingly, some of the figures created for the Day of the Dead festival looked a bit like Ed Roth's demons. So that's how I came up with Glottis. He's a great character – he's basically a child, really. He's innocent. Manny's the darker one, but Glottis lightens the mood, and provides commentary when Manny might be afraid to – he has no self-consciousness."

Glottis was superbly written – he's easily the funniest character in the game, and the one you least want to leave behind at the end – but what was most striking about him was his manic countenance. His appearance was simple to the point of being geometric, and the bulging eyeballs and twisting, spitting mouth stretched across his giant 3D head were strangely more emotive (and adorable) than anything modern graphics technology has been able to produce over the past few years. This doesn't surprise Schafer – what was truly astonishing to him was what it took for it to be greenlit in the first place. LucasArts, after all, was the home of Ron Gilbert's SCUMM, the 2D engine that had powered everything from *Maniac Mansion* to *The Curse Of Monkey Island*. And in the early days, if someone in the adventure game division suggested another technology supersede it, it was tantamount to blasphemy.

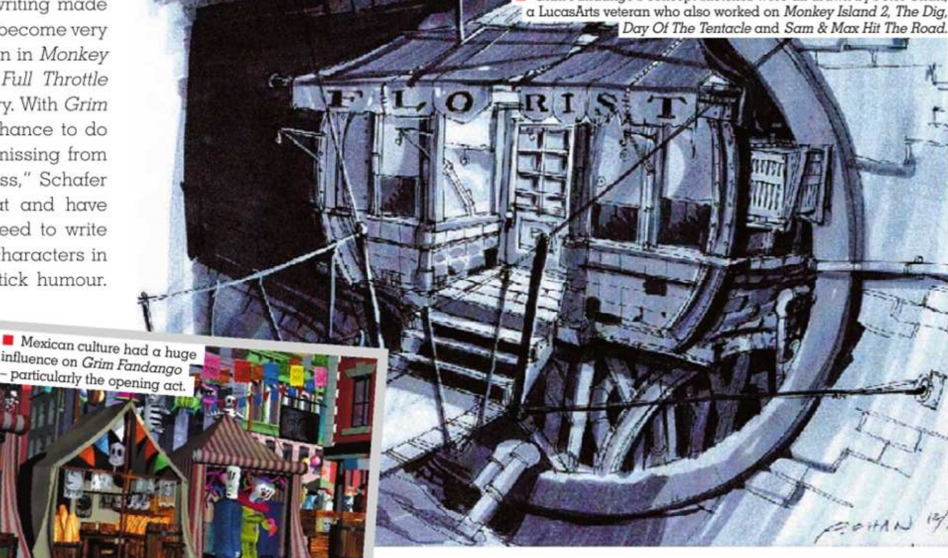
Then in 1992, Gilbert left to form Humongous Games. "Everything changed," says Schafer. "When I first came to Lucas, Ron was king. He made SCUMM and worked on it, so as long as you were comfortable with the technology, you didn't have to worry about that side of things. So, we focused on story. It's just the way it worked. After he left, though, I guess people wanted more control over the technology, and tried some different engines. But most didn't do as well as SCUMM because everyone knew about SCUMM. Eventually we felt the same way and just thought there was more stuff we wanted to do than what SCUMM could provide. So we made our own engine."

The engine, in a tribute to SCUMM, was called GrimE (grime). And for the first time in Lucas adventure history, it was based on 3D technology. As Schafer is wont to remind us, this was a purely commercial decision. That said, he was eager to make the new and crude technology work for his vision. "3D games were really ugly at first," Schafer admits. "At Lucas, we had artists doing gorgeous 2D backgrounds, and we'd become very proficient at that. 3D, though, was totally unfamiliar. Characters in 3D games then looked like big boxes with, you know, the details spray-painted on top. It was awful. But you know what? I realised that the papier-mâché skeletons they have on the Day of the Dead – they were little vignettes of life, like going to the dentist or going shopping, but with skeletons – were just like what 3D could do at the time. Little 3D figures with the skeleton painted on. So it worked for us, because our art reference became these 3D, simple sculptures."

I HAD A HARD TIME SELLING IT. THEY SAID NO ONE WILL WANT TO BE A DEAD GUY


Grim Fandango is a dark and mature story. But it's not without a sense of humour.

If the technology was unfamiliar, the writing made Schafer feel right at home. Although he'd become very adept at the sort of slapstick humour seen in *Monkey Island* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, with *Full Throttle* (1995), he started exploring darker territory. With *Grim Fandango*, however, he was given the chance to do so on an epic scale. "I think what was missing from a lot of the LucasArts games was sadness," Schafer explains. "So I wanted to examine that and have that in the game. Of course, we also need to write for what's appropriate to the story. The characters in *Day Of The Tentacle* needed that slapstick humour. You're not going to have Bernard discover anything about himself, or something like that, because that's just not funny. For Manny Calavera, however, slapstick comedy doesn't work for him. It's still got comedy in there – especially with Glottis – but sadness and despair is talked about in *Grim*. It's not talked about in *Monkey Island* or *Day Of The Tentacle*. And I think it's important to have some of that. People don't get enough sadness and loneliness in games. They don't examine that enough."



■ *Grim Fandango*'s concept sketches were all drawn by Peter Chan, a LucasArts veteran who also worked on *Monkey Island 2*, *The Dig*, *Day Of The Tentacle* and *Sam & Max Hit The Road*.

■ Mexican culture had a huge influence on *Grim Fandango* – particularly the opening act.

■■■ ONE OF THE most tragic scenes in the game is when Lola, Manny's friend, is found dying – in *Grim's* world, a lethal gunshot wound causes the victim to crumble and sprout a bed of flowers – in Rubacava. She expresses her love for Manny, which she knows won't be reciprocated – after all, he remains hopelessly in love with Meche. After that, she decays, and the flowers that have grown from her body are scattered into the wind. It's not exactly box-quote material. Schafer laughs again: "I had a hard time selling it. They said no one will want to be a dead guy. Touché. I guess a lot of people don't really fantasise about being dead. You know, they want to be a psychic kid, or a pirate, or a biker. But I sold it on the 3D premise. I was, like, we need to join the modern world. We're going to be highly commercial."


TIM SCHAFER
Project Leader

Unfortunately, three dimensions wasn't enough to sell a game about skeletons in love. (Go figure.) While claims it was a *Waterworld*-esque flop are unwarranted, it certainly didn't make as much as Schafer's previous adventure. "I made money from it," Schafer shrugs, "But it sold half as much as *Full Throttle*. But, you know, I guess that makes sense: *Full Throttle* was about a big tough-guy biker. More people are going to be attracted to that than a picture of a skeleton smoking a cigarette."

Some say that because of its disappointing sales, *Grim* was, quite ironically, one of the final nails in the adventure game's coffin. Frankly, though, Schafer couldn't be happier. "There's no need to keep it alive just for the sake of it," he says. "It's best to learn from it – take what you can from adventures, and apply it to other genres, as I did with platformers in *Psychonauts*, and as I'm doing with open-world action in *Brütal Legend*."

The graphic adventure remains alive – and, occasionally, commercially viable, as we've seen with Telltale's episodic games – but it's not unreasonable to suggest that nothing has come close to what *Grim* offered over ten years ago. As a piece of interactive art, too, it remains largely unmatched. In an age when we're rolling out top marks for anything with vectorised graphics, a nonsensical name, and made by under five people, *Grim* remains pure class. You may not be able to appreciate the art of it, but you can't deny the art in it. And that, gentlemen with facial hair, is all you should ever need.


■ *Grim* may start small, as a typical day in the office, but it ends in epic style.


■ Manny and Glottis relax with a drink and a tune. A favourite scene from the game.

Music Of The Dead

The unusual soundtrack to Grim Fandango

■ ONE OF THE most important facets of the *Grim* experience, other than the glorious concept and artwork, was the music. Seamlessly shifting from bossa nova to burlesque jazz, the *Grim* soundtrack is both highly unusual in videogames and perfectly suited to the game in question. Every track was composed or co-ordinated by Peter McConnell, Schafer's long-time musical collaborator, and is worth an extended play even if you have no interest in the criminal underbelly of the spiritual underworld. (But really, what's wrong with you?)



Hall Of Fame…
Mega Man

Capcom's most enduring mascot may have a patchy reputation but his incredible number of starring roles surely make him even more prolific than Mario…

THE MID-EIGHTIES was a time of steep competition as a multitude of producers all vied for top positions on the new home consoles. Among the masses, Capcom found significant success with 1985's *Ghosts 'N Goblins* on NES, but the company needed a mascot to lift it into the mass gaming consciousness. Back then, Capcom was but a fraction of the leviathan it is today, and a limited workforce dictated that Mega Man's life was largely in the hands of one man: Keiji Inafune. Inafune not only developed all of the character art and designs, he also constructed these designs into pixel form, as well as creating the game's logo, packaging and instruction booklet. In many ways, this initial release failed. The box art was a joke, the graphics were mediocre, and the story was far from original – even Mega Man himself was uninspired, being a common example of the sci-fi and anime designs popular in the Eighties. The result of all this was limited commercial success. But one element was sublime: the gameplay.

The non-linear format, in which players can choose the order of levels, and the idea of stealing bosses' weapons were innovations at the time and gave *Mega Man 2* the framework from which to reach the mass consumer. Though fundamentally the same game, the second in the series added polish by the spade. The boss count was increased to eight, passwords were added, Mega Man's powers could be upgraded with three items from Dr Light, the music was par excellence and the graphics were unique and wonderfully stylised. Capcom had given the franchise the treatment it deserved, shown a willingness to deliver a top-quality product and left us enthusiastic about its future. Number three came and delivered yet another top gaming experience. Then Capcom began to show the trait fans now agonisingly associate it with – releasing endless replicas of its top franchises at the sacrifice of quality. While other developers were moving on to the new 16-bit consoles, Capcom held *Mega Man* back for five years, until the SNES release of *Mega Man 7* in 1995. Thankfully, the 1993 release of spin-off series *Mega Man X* bridged the gap.

Mega Man X tells the story of X, a robot capable of emotions and consciousness. Dr Light fears that X is too advanced for his time and hides him away for 100 years until he is unearthed by Dr Cain to fight against the Mavericks. X would be aided by new blonde comrade Zero. Keiji Inafune has previously admitted that Zero was originally intended to be the new Mega Man. However, after designing Zero, it was feared that fans wouldn't relate him to Mega Man due to wide visual differences, so X was used instead. Zero was finally made playable in X3 and used a contrasting gameplay mechanic; where X used long-range projectiles, Zero had a powerful sabre weapon for close-range combat. This contrasting gameplay, in conjunction with new moves and interconnected level design, made X another promising series. However, Capcom allowed X to slip into repetitive boredom, with each sequel wearing a little thinner than the last.

IT IS DIFFICULT to decide whether constantly replacing series with newer ones is a good thing or not. The old series are missed, the new ones relished. Either way, the classic *Mega Man* experience would be renovated twice more with the releases of *Mega Man Zero* for GBA, and *Mega Man ZX* for DS. Each of these games has held true to the *Mega Man* formula while still finding a uniqueness through stylistic flair and tweaks in gameplay. *Mega Man Zero* succeeded in this by giving fans what they had hoped for: Zero as a lead character. *Zero* also featured weapons mastering, the cyber elves (who are found throughout levels and can halve a boss's life or save Zero from a pit) and finally, the fantastic variable boss deaths, where the type of kill determines the finishing animation. Development for *Mega Man ZX* came in the form of free exploration before and during missions, having players find the mission areas themselves. There was also the addition of Biometal – weak points on bosses, that would heavily reduce their life but also reduce the rank received at the mission's end.

As a mascot, Mega Man's personality was left open enough to allow for a wide stable of games without contradicting his character. *Mega Man Legends* introduced the Blue Bomber to the third dimension and *Battle Network* had its unique hybrid of card-collector/action-strategy gameplay. Then there's the action-RPG *Star Force*, *Mario Kart* clone *Battle And Chase* and a whole host of other titles right down to board-game title *Rock Board*. All these, however, owe their lives to the platform-blasting pleasure of their forefather. The recent release of *Mega Man ZX Advent* marks 20 years since Mega Man was told, at the original's ending, to "Fight, Mega Man! For everlasting peace". After 71 titles, the little Blue Bomber seems to have taken it to heart.

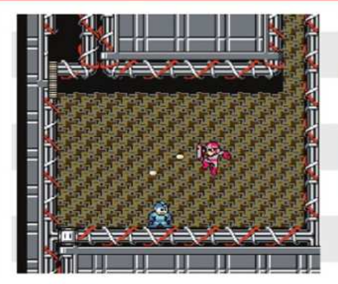
>. MAGIC MOMENTS



■ The original 1987 game did not meet with much success, but the level design and gameplay created the base for the franchise.



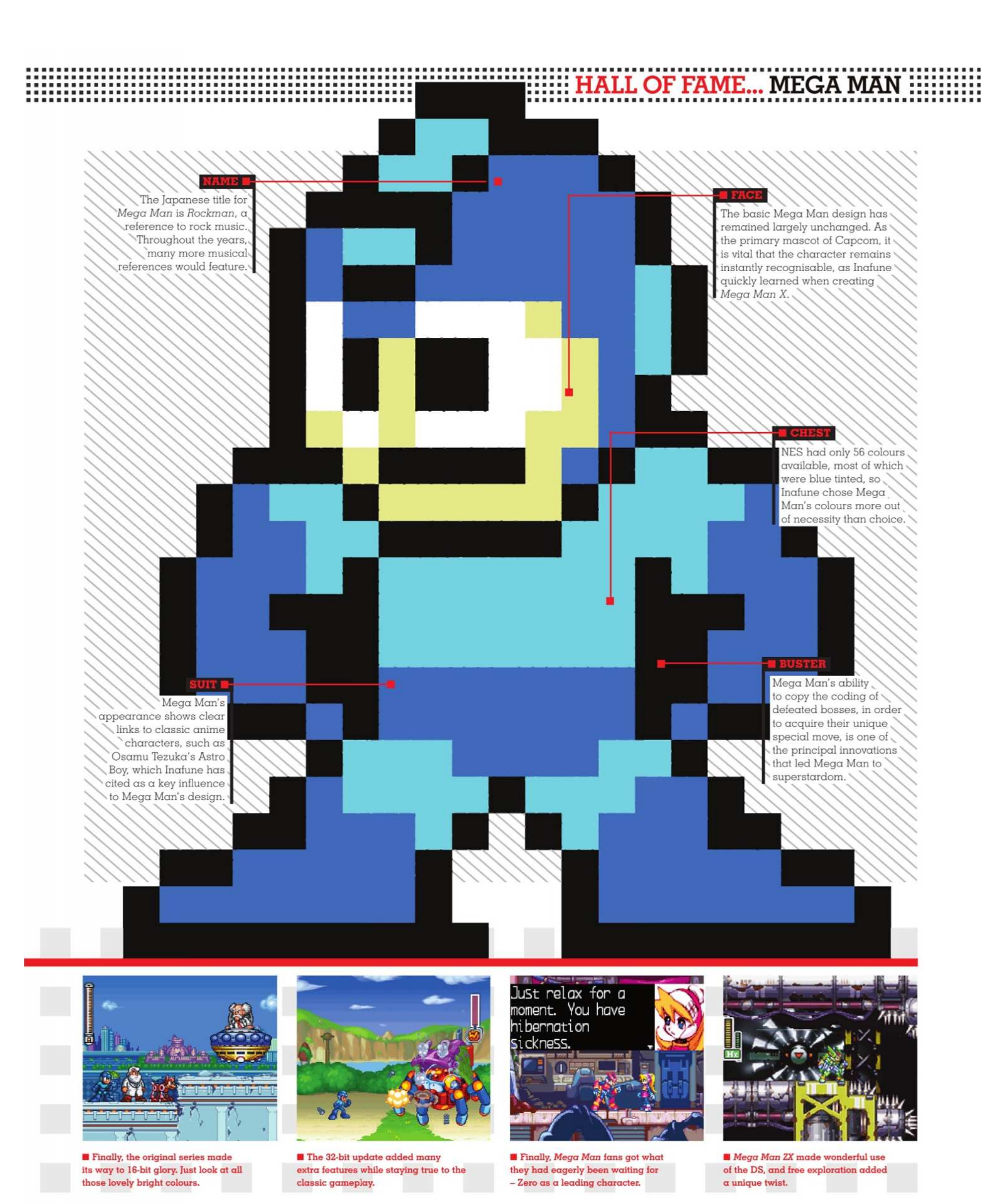
■ *Mega Man 2* took the classic gameplay of the original and added a hefty amount of polish.



■ Another top-notch game that perfected the gaming experience. Sadly, this was the last title before the steep downhill slope.



■ The very first 16-bit title held a rather pleasant surprise within it – yes, it's Ryu's Hadouken.



NAME

The Japanese title for *Mega Man* is *Rockman*, a reference to rock music. Throughout the years, many more musical references would feature.

FACE

The basic Mega Man design has remained largely unchanged. As the primary mascot of Capcom, it is vital that the character remains instantly recognisable, as Inafune quickly learned when creating *Mega Man X*.

CHEST

NES had only 56 colours available, most of which were blue tinted, so Inafune chose Mega Man's colours more out of necessity than choice.

SUIT

Mega Man's appearance shows clear links to classic anime characters, such as Osamu Tezuka's Astro Boy, which Inafune has cited as a key influence to Mega Man's design.

BUSTER

Mega Man's ability to copy the coding of defeated bosses, in order to acquire their unique special move, is one of the principal innovations that led Mega Man to superstardom.

■ Finally, the original series made its way to 16-bit glory. Just look at all those lovely bright colours.

■ The 32-bit update added many extra features while staying true to the classic gameplay.

■ Finally, *Mega Man* fans got what they had eagerly been waiting for – Zero as a leading character.

■ *Mega Man ZX* made wonderful use of the DS, and free exploration added a unique twist.



HALL OF FAME… MEGA MAN
THE PLATFORM GAMES

MEGA MAN

■■■ RELEASED IN 1987, the original *Mega Man* wasn't wildly successful. The gameplay was excellent, but low-key presentation failed to grab mainstream attention. Capcom put more time and effort into the following two sequels and both were of the highest quality. Five years of frustration came before Mega Man's 16-bit debut with *Mega Man 7*, but this was overshadowed by the more stylised *Mega Man X* series.





NAME: Mega Man
YEAR: 1987
FORMAT: NES, PC



NAME: Mega Man 2
YEAR: 1988
FORMAT: NES

MEGA FACT: Inafune had to bargain with Capcom to be allowed to design a sequel to commercial failure, *Mega Man*. It was developed alongside other games in his spare time.





NAME: Mega Man 3
YEAR: 1990
FORMAT: NES, PC



MEGA FACT: *Mega Man 4* has the highest number of weapons in the original *Mega Man* series.

NAME: Mega Man 4
YEAR: 1991
FORMAT: NES

NAME: Mega Man 5
YEAR: 1992
FORMAT: NES

NAME: Mega Man 6
YEAR: 1993
FORMAT: NES

NAME: Mega Man 7
YEAR: 1995
FORMAT: SNES

MEGA FACT: The only original game to be released exclusively on CD-ROM, *Mega Man 8* included anime-like FMV cut-scenes.

NAME: Mega Man 8
YEAR: 1996
FORMAT: PSone, Saturn

MEGA MAN X

■■■ MEGA MAN X is a continuation of the original series in plot and gameplay with two main differences. The first is the interconnected style of level design, whereby events in one stage change those in another. Secondly, X had several new abilities that refreshed gameplay while maintaining the classic feel. These included clinging to walls and sliding down them or jumping ever upward breaking bricks with his head, the dash, and, in a breath of genius, the Hadouken – successfully bridging the gap between Capcom's two leading franchises. The introduction of close-range fighting pal Zero in X3 helped widen the gameplay mechanics.



























MEGA FACT: *Mega Man X* was remade by Taito for the PSP in 2005 as *Mega Man Maverick Hunter X*.





NAME: Mega Man X
YEAR: 1993
FORMAT: SNES, PC



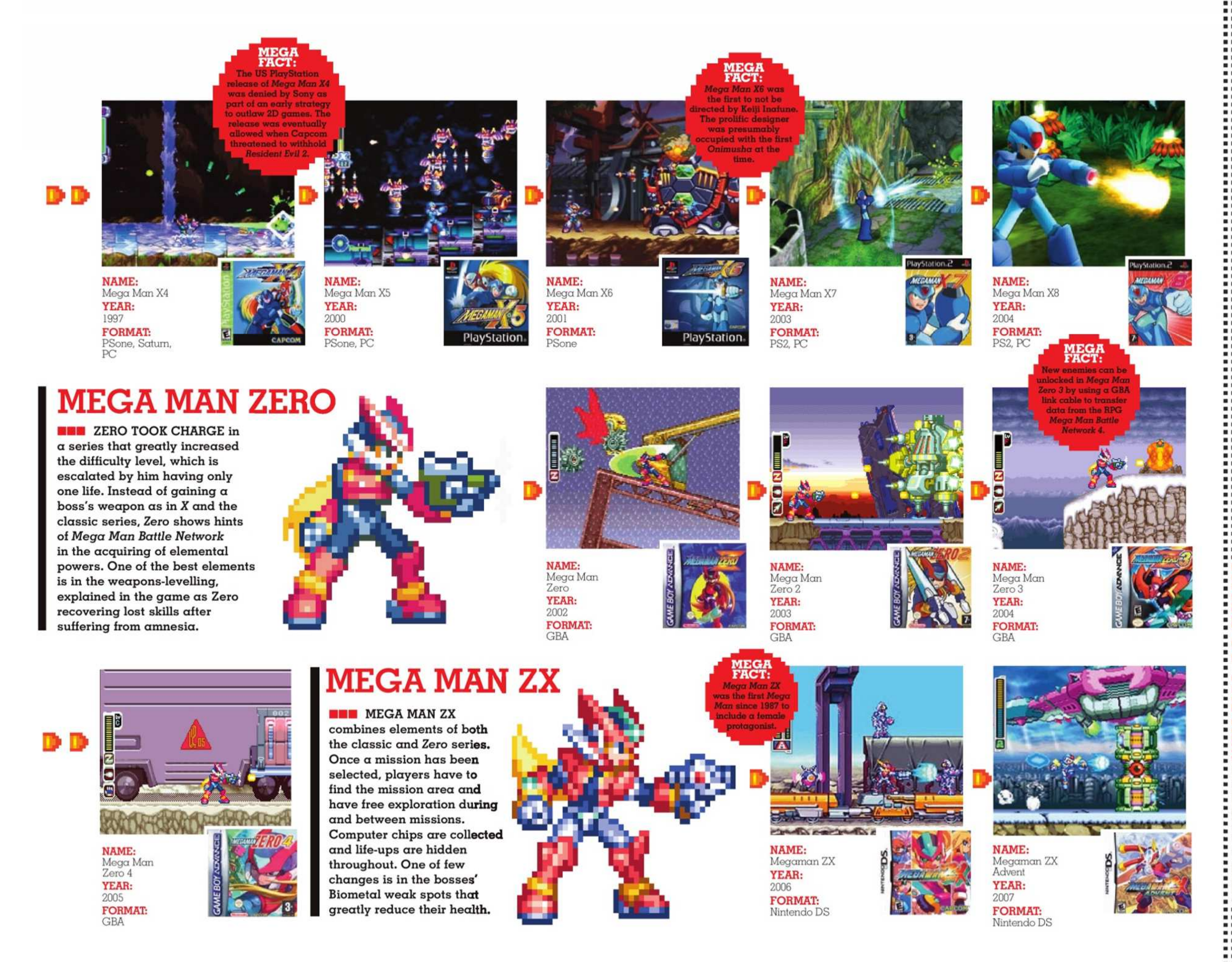



NAME: Mega Man X2
YEAR: 1994
FORMAT: SNES





NAME: Mega Man X3
YEAR: 1995
FORMAT: PSone, PC, Saturn, SNES



MEGA FACT: The US PlayStation release of *Mega Man X4* was denied by Sony as part of an early strategy to outlaw 2D games. The release was eventually allowed when Capcom threatened to withhold *Resident Evil 2*.

NAME: Mega Man X4
YEAR: 1997
FORMAT: PSone, Saturn, PC

NAME: Mega Man X5
YEAR: 2000
FORMAT: PSone, PC

NAME: Mega Man X6
YEAR: 2001
FORMAT: PSone

MEGA FACT: *Mega Man X6* was the first to not be directed by Keiji Inafune. The prolific designer was presumably occupied with the first *Onimusha* at the time.

NAME: Mega Man X7
YEAR: 2003
FORMAT: PS2, PC

NAME: Mega Man X8
YEAR: 2004
FORMAT: PS2, PC

MEGA MAN ZERO

ZERO TOOK CHARGE in a series that greatly increased the difficulty level, which is escalated by him having only one life. Instead of gaining a boss's weapon as in *X* and the classic series, *Zero* shows hints of *Mega Man Battle Network* in the acquiring of elemental powers. One of the best elements is in the weapons-levelling, explained in the game as Zero recovering lost skills after suffering from amnesia.

NAME: Mega Man Zero
YEAR: 2002
FORMAT: GBA

NAME: Mega Man Zero 2
YEAR: 2003
FORMAT: GBA

MEGA FACT: New enemies can be unlocked in *Mega Man Zero 3* by using a GBA link cable to transfer data from the RPG *Mega Man Battle Network 4*.

NAME: Mega Man Zero 3
YEAR: 2004
FORMAT: GBA

NAME: Mega Man Zero 4
YEAR: 2005
FORMAT: GBA

MEGA MAN ZX

MEGA MAN ZX combines elements of both the classic and *Zero* series. Once a mission has been selected, players have to find the mission area and have free exploration during and between missions. Computer chips are collected and life-ups are hidden throughout. One of few changes is in the bosses' Biometal weak spots that greatly reduce their health.

MEGA FACT: *Mega Man ZX* was the first *Mega Man* since 1987 to include a female protagonist.

NAME: Megaman ZX
YEAR: 2006
FORMAT: Nintendo DS

NAME: Megaman ZX Advent
YEAR: 2007
FORMAT: Nintendo DS

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Your monthly guide to collectable retro treasures



DETAILS

FORMAT: NES
YEAR: 1990
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Nintendo/Square
EXPECT TO PAY: Around £12,000



EXHIBIT A: Here it is, the Holy Grail of game collecting. Rare, expensive and very cool.



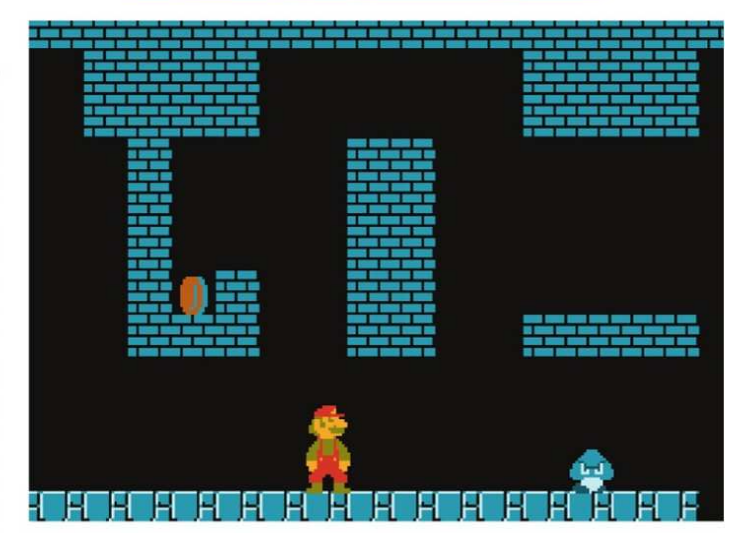
EXHIBIT B: Don't have £12,000 to spare? You might like to aim for the slightly more attainable grey edition.

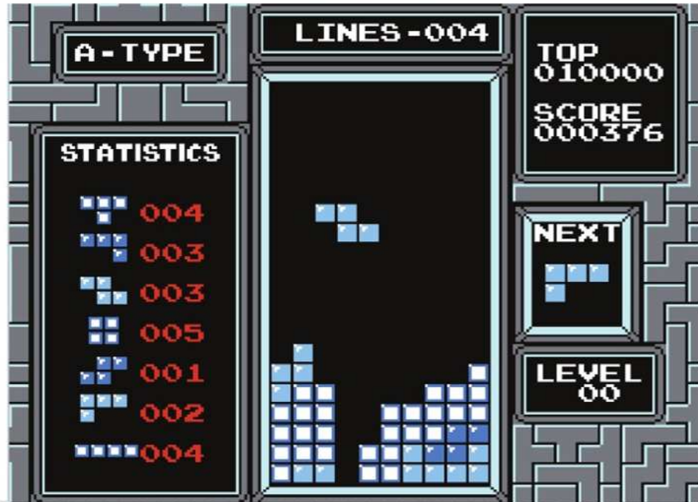
NINTENDO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP GOLD

If you'd like games™ to feature you and your prized possession in Collector's Corner, email us at retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Why It's Rare

OFFICIALLY THE world's rarest and most expensive game in existence, the gold *Nintendo World Championship* cartridge is an extremely desirable collectors item for a very good reason. The collector's item dates back to a nationwide US contest held by Nintendo in 1990, which used specially created NES cartridges to test the skill of the player. 90 cartridges were produced for the contest and were eventually given away to those gamers who were good enough to reach the semi-final. These carts were moulded in grey plastic and are worth around three thousand pounds – a staggeringly high price for any game, but nothing when compared with the more elusive gold cartridge. Just 26 gold *NWC* cartridges were produced and were either awarded to contest finalists as a prize or given away to readers of *Nintendo Power* magazine. A few of the winners naturally held on to their well-earned prizes, but many took advantage of the high interest surrounding *Nintendo World Championship* and decided to auction off their carts, leading to some of the most sensational auctions in game-collecting history. The gold cartridge has been known to sell in excess of $20,000 and recently reignited attention when it sold to JJ Hendricks for $17,500 on eBay.

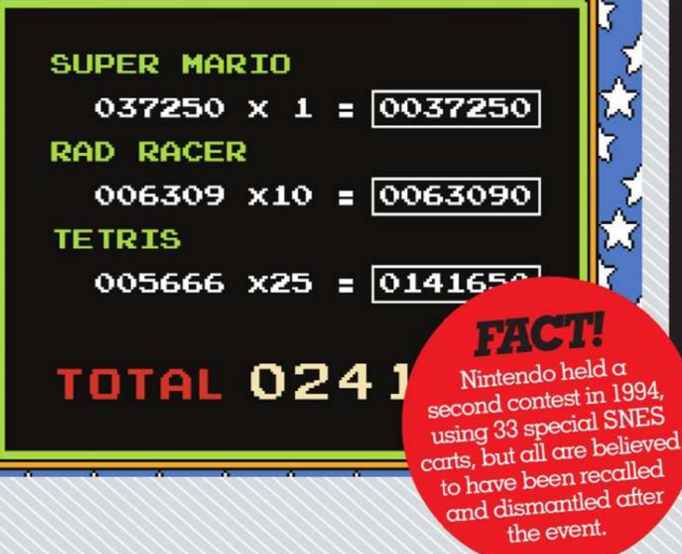




Worth Playing?

NO GAME is worth spending more than £10,000 on if all you intend to do is play it. The *Nintendo World Championship* cart is a prestige collector's item or a shrewd investment and shouldn't really be thought of as a game at all. But that doesn't mean you can't have fun with it. As a test of your gaming skill, *NWC* is just as good as it was in 1990 and still poses quite a challenge. The cart gives you a time limit of 6 minutes 21 seconds to earn 50 coins in *Super Mario Bros*, complete one race in *Rad Racer* and score as many points as possible in *Tetris*. It then adds up all three games' scores, with a 10x multiplier for the *Rad Racer* score and a 25x multiplier for *Tetris*, and presents you with a grand total. And though you can no longer win the official competition (of course), the scorekeepers at Twin Galaxies will still accept submissions for your world-record attempt. The current record was actually made earlier this year by one Tom Votava and his score of 2,008,685, which is ridiculously hard to beat. We'd know; we've tried.





FACT! Nintendo held a second contest in 1994, using 33 special SNES carts, but all are believed to have been recalled and dismantled after the event.

I'VE GOT ONE

Name: **JJ Hendricks**
Occupation: **Store Owner**

How did you get into collecting games – and extreme rarities in particular?
I got into game collecting through game retailing. For the last ten years I've run online games retailer JJGames.com, and I kept on getting requests from customers for really rare games. I would look up information on them and ask questions about them on message boards. Eventually I started a website for game collectors, called VideoGamePriceCharts.com, which lets collectors know how much their games are worth. The really rare games caught my interest the most because they are so much harder to find and usually more popular with collectors. I don't want to have a room full of videogames so I decided I would buy a few of the really rare games instead of buying tons of average games.

How difficult has the hunt for the *NWC* cart been?
I had been looking for the Gold cartridge for about three months before I purchased it. I knew it existed for a number of years, but started researching it more during the last five or six months. I think *NWC Gold* will continue to increase in value as game collecting becomes more popular and gamers get more disposable income as they get older. So I decided I should buy one if I could find it. I didn't look that hard but knew that the game came up for auction on eBay every now and again. Luckily for me it only took about three months after deciding to buy it before the item was listed and I could contact the seller.

How did you find the game and how smooth was the transaction?
The game was listed on eBay for $25,000. I contacted the seller and gave him my best offer of $17,500. That was the initial contact. After that the transaction took a lot of twists and turns. Some other people came in with higher offers but backed out. The seller said he had shipped it to the wrong address, only to tell me that he had decided not to sell it when I called to correct the error. And he told me he shipped it two other times when in fact he hadn't. There was much more stress in buying the game than I would have liked, but it turned out well in the end.

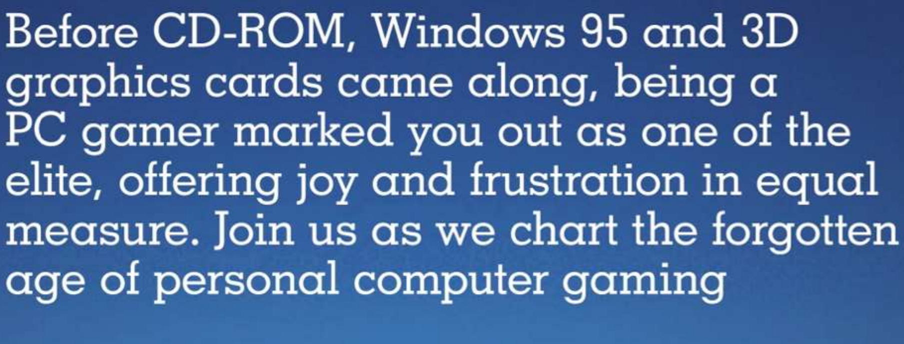
Have you actually played the game or will it stay in a display cabinet?
I played the game when it first arrived to make sure it worked, but it hasn't been played since. I own a reproduction of the game that only costs $50 so I play that one instead of the real version because I don't want to break it.

Was it really worth the price?
Definitely. I think it will be like the *Action Comic #1* or the Honus Wagner baseball card of videogames. My belief is that it will increase in value and be a good investment. It is definitely a lot of money, but compared to other collectables like art, comics, or baseball cards it is very cheap.

Do you ever see yourself parting with the cartridge?
I'm sure I will sell the game some day. I've already received two offers to buy the game for $20,000 and some day I will take someone up on one of those offers. The curator at a videogame museum, who is a friend of mine, contacted me and jokingly asked if I would donate to his museum in my will. Maybe I'll take him up on the offer, but most likely I will sell it at some point.



PC GAMING
THE FLOPPY YEARS



Before CD-ROM, Windows 95 and 3D graphics cards came along, being a PC gamer marked you out as one of the elite, offering joy and frustration in equal measure. Join us as we chart the forgotten age of personal computer gaming

WHILE IT'S CERTAINLY true that modern PC gaming requires a little more dedication than its console-based counterpart, those gamers who use their personal computer as a platform for interactive entertainment have, literally, never had it so good. Today's PCs are at the cutting edge of the videogaming spectrum and are capable of operating with minimum fuss, providing you have the appropriate standard of hardware, but it hasn't always been this way.

Not so long ago, gaming on a PC was a painful experience plagued by incompatibility issues, bloated operating systems, arduous command line installation procedures and exasperating virtual memory woes. Before Windows 95 came along and kick-started a slow-burn revolution that eventually led to the Holy Grail of plug-and-play computing, those that eschewed the ageing 16-bit home micros and ignored the burgeoning console industry were forced to sail the choppy and often chaotic waters of PC gaming. However, their perseverance was rewarded with experiences that few other platforms could provide, and the influence of the PC has reverberated through the years, with titles such as *Doom*, *Command & Conquer* and *Monkey Island* becoming household names.

It would be disingenuous to attempt to chart the development of the PC as a gaming platform, because the evolution of the format is so difficult to pin down accurately. Unlike console hardware, which advances in cycles of roughly five years, it's been constantly developing over the past three decades and has been created with the input of countless different software and hardware manufacturers. However, when investigating the early history of the platform you'll often hear the term 'IBM-PC'. Released by IBM in 1981, the first IBM-PC – also known as the 5150 – was inspired by Apple's hugely successful Apple II computer and was based on the new Intel 8088 processor. Thanks to its open architecture and use of off-the-shelf parts, it experienced an incredible amount of commercial success, and within a short space of time the system (and the ranks of '100 per cent compatible' clones that sprang up around it) dominated the business computer market, with only the likes of Apple putting up any serious resistance. These powerful machines – produced to crunch numbers and drive up productivity – were snapped up in their millions. As history has taught us, when you give someone a hi-tech piece of equipment, more often than not they'll want to use it for entertainment purposes, and it wasn't long before IBM-PC games started to appear.

PC HARDWARE HAS CONSTANTLY DEVELOPED OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES

DESPITE THIS MASSIVE installed base of potential users, there was one key problem: compared to the significantly cheaper 16-bit home computers – such as the Amiga and Atari ST, both of which had became available by the mid-Eighties – most of the PC games available during this period looked and sounded awful. Graphics were presented in garish 16-colour EGA, and without dedicated sound hardware the aural experience was reduced to a cacophony of terrible beeps from the PC's internal speaker. However, it's worth noting that the appealing Atari ST and Amiga were approaching the market from an entirely different angle, being aimed more at casual users and parents who wanted to buy their children a home system that could help with their schoolwork. Meanwhile, the more business-orientated PC encountered no such resistance as it was already sitting in the homes of many people across the world and a CONTINUED >



Top Five FPS

Wolfenstein 3D

Released: **1992**
Publisher: **Apogee Software**
Developer: **id Software**



Effectively the one that started it all, id Software's fast-paced WWII action title kick-started a genre. It was ported to pretty much every format of the era, and is still going strong today. It also became famous for featuring a robotic Hitler.

Doom

Released: **1993**
Publisher: **GT Interactive**
Developer: **id Software**



Following the success of *Wolfenstein* was never going to be easy, but *Doom* bettered its predecessor in practically every way with improved visuals, more exciting gameplay and devastatingly impressive weapons (BFG 9000, anyone?). It also popularised the concept of online deathmatches.

Rise Of The Triad

Released: **1994**
Publisher: **Apogee Software**
Developer: **In-House**

Created using an enhanced *Wolfenstein 3D* engine, *Rise Of The Triad* is famous for introducing the FPS world to the joys of dual-wielding and 'Ludicrous Gibs'. Despite the humble origins of the game engine, *ROTT* sported massive levels with several different floors.

Descent

Released: **1995**
Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Parallax Software**



While other companies struggled to emulate the successful formula of *Doom*, Parallax Software decided to go one better by giving the player 360 degrees of freedom, rather than tying them to a horizontal plane. Although it was often disorientating, *Descent* was a truly groundbreaking title.

Blake Stone: Aliens Of Gold

Released: **1993**
Publisher: **Apogee Software**
Developer: **JAM Productions**





Unlucky enough to have been released a week before the shareware version of *Doom* appeared, *Blake Stone: Aliens Of Gold* is an often-overlooked but solid science-fiction-themed corridor-based blaster that improves on *Wolfenstein 3D* in many ways.

burgeoning gaming industry slowly began to grow around it, despite the often-disappointing presentation of the games. Some titles managed to overcome the platform's inherent graphical weaknesses and still sold by the bucket load, such as Alexey Pajitnov's legendary block puzzler *Tetris*, which made its debut on PC in 1984. Once again, this popularity was due in no small part to the fact that the system was so ubiquitous.

As the Nineties drew nearer, the PC was becoming increasingly viable as a gaming system thanks to rapidly improving media capabilities. The most significant advancement was the emergence of Video Graphics Array (VGA) display hardware in 1987. This new video standard allowed for lush visuals that were way ahead of anything seen on other formats available at the time and heralded the dawn of a new and exciting era. Another key improvement was the advent of dedicated sound hardware, which finally gave PC owners the aural experience they deserved. This was largely thanks to the work of Creative Labs and its Sound Blaster card. The first variant of this card had an 11-voice FM synthesiser and the ability to play sampled sounds, but arguably the most important aspect of the board was the inclusion of a game port, into which users could connect a joystick. Unlike its 16-bit home computer competitors, the PC lacked a joystick port 'out of the box' and required users to purchase a dedicated card to gain such a feature. Creative's decision to include the port on the Sound Blaster played a massive part in its ultimate success and proved that more PC owners than ever were keen to unlock the entertainment potential that had been lying dormant in their computers for so long.

> **PC BECAME A VIABLE GAMING SYSTEM THANKS TO RAPIDLY IMPROVING MEDIA CAPABILITIES**

THIS UNIQUE ABILITY to upgrade incrementally gave the PC a vital advantage over the rapidly ageing Amiga and ST and slowly but surely the format began to pull away from the existing 16-bit home computers. While Commodore, Atari and Apple all adopted a model whereby they periodically released new and more powerful variants of their machines, the PC simply kept evolving, unbound by the restrictions of traditional hardware manufacture. Users could add more memory, boost the graphical performance or completely upgrade their CPU, and this adaptability allowed the system to effectively dominate the personal computer market by the time the Nineties arrived.

However, its origins as an easily expandable device also proved to be something of a curse as well as a blessing. Although Microsoft had released its Windows graphical user interface in 1985 to make managing the PC's confusing file structure a little easier, it merely functioned as an add-on working on top of Microsoft



PLAY IT NOW

IT'S ALL very well getting misty-eyed over what many deem to be the golden era of PC gaming, but thanks to the fast-moving nature of computer hardware, it's difficult to play these games today. Still, thanks to sites like Good Old Games (www.gog.com), Abandonia (www.abandonia.com) and Home of the Underdogs (www.homeoftheunderdogs.net), getting old PC titles running on current hardware has never been easier, and Steam offers vintage titles, too. If you're keen to take the emulation route, you'll need programs such as DOSbox, which, as you might imagine, emulates MS-DOS; SCUMMVM, which supports loads of different point-and-clicks; and Exult, which plays *Ultima VII*. Of course, purists will argue that unless you play on the original hardware, you won't get a true feel for what it was like to spend days getting a game to work. Thanks to the proliferation of PC hardware, however, getting hold of a 486 PC isn't difficult, and acquiring the software shouldn't present too many problems, either. Just make sure you have plenty of room… and the patience of a saint.



King's Quest may look crude by today's standards, but back when it was released it was cutting edge stuff.



Wing Commander combined immersive visuals with a movie-like plot, and spawned several successful sequels and a less successful live-action movie.

Disk Operating System (more commonly known as MS-DOS) – a command-line operating system that required the user to laboriously enter data in order to run programs. While DOS offered an impressive degree of freedom to those willing to master its complexity, it proved to be a real stumbling block for PC gamers and wasn't entirely done away with entirely until the mid-Nineties.

In addition to this, the fact that a PC was made up of many different components – all produced by different companies – made running cutting-edge games a bit of a nightmare. The staggering number of different components available meant that compatibility with all games was rarely guaranteed. A wide range of different drivers were required to get such parts to function properly and it has to be remembered that this was in the days before the internet was widespread. Back in the DOS era every single item you plugged into the PC required a driver. Plug-and-play hardware didn't come until Microsoft released Windows 95, and even then it was a few years before such a feature operated effectively.

Another potential pitfall was the peculiarity of DOS itself. Mention 'Expanded Memory' and 'boot disks' to any veteran PC gamer and they will probably flash you a look of total fear. These were just two of the many problems that tested the sanity of users back in the day. However, when cataloguing these problems it's important to remember that, unlike console systems, PCs were simply not intended for entertainment purposes. And besides, as annoying as the laborious installation procedures, mind-bending configuration issues and incompatibility between components all were, the rewards for persistence made all the suffering worth it.

THE PC FORMAT was beginning to assert itself as a gaming platform, and console owners could only marvel at titles such as *Wing Commander*, *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*, *Ultima Underworld* and *Star Wars: X-Wing*. These games were nothing short of breathtaking when compared with what was being released on Mega Drive and SNES, yet they were often tantalisingly out of reach for the average teenaged games player. It's easy to forget in today's market, where a reasonably powerful desktop PC can be obtained for not much more than the price of a PlayStation 3, but back in the early-Nineties a reasonably powered PC rig could set you back well over a thousand pounds. The machine was still seen primarily as a platform intended for business users, with the game facet coming as a neat bonus. It would take some time for this perception to shift.

However, a shift was most definitely occurring. While many companies led their development on the Amiga or Atari ST before porting to PC, most titles were programmed primarily with the PC's power in mind, reflecting the huge technological advancements that were being made at the time. The situation had reversed itself. Whereas previously PC owners had to make do with being second best, now rival formats were getting scaled-down conversions of best-selling PC games.

Because of the PC's smaller installed base in Japan, the overwhelming majority of games for the platform were produced by Western CONTINUED >.

THE PLAYERS The biggest names in retro PC gaming



Sired from the loins of George Lucas's film company, Lucasfilm Games was perhaps best known for its quirky point-and-click adventures as well as games based on the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* properties. The company went on to be a staunch supporter of CD-ROM technology with games such as *Full Throttle* and *Star Wars: Rebel Assault*.

Founded back in 1991 by John Carmack, John Romero, Tom Hall and Adrian Carmack, the Texas-based id Software is arguably among the most famous and influential software houses of all time. The company was heavily involved in the shareware scene and scored massive hits with *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* before working on its best-selling *Quake* series.

Founded in 1985 by Brett Sperry and Louis Castle, Westwood originally specialised in porting other companies' titles. It soon went on to develop its own, with *Dune II* and the popular *Eye Of The Beholder* series, but it was the *Command & Conquer* series that put the firm on the map in 1995. By then it had been sold to Virgin Interactive, and later swallowed up by EA in 1998.



Much like id Software, Epic Mega Games started off creating light-hearted shareware platform titles for PC before hitting gold with 1998's sci-fi FPS *Unreal*. This seminal game spawned an entire series – including the popular *Unreal Tournament* range – but Epic's crowning glory to date is its *Gears Of War* games. The company's Unreal Engine 3 has been licensed by countless other software houses.



Founded in 1979 by husband-and-wife team Ken and Roberta Williams, Sierra produced such hits as *King's Quest*, *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Gabriel Knight*, *SWAT*, *Police Quest* and *Space Quest*. Sierra also published titles for other firms and, thanks to rapid expansion, became a key player in the PC world. The firm was acquired by Vivendi and then absorbed into Activision Blizzard.

TOP FIVE STRATEGY



Dune II: The Battle Of Arrakis

Released: **1992**
Publisher: **Virgin Interactive**
Developer: **Westwood Studios**

Although many will argue that Technosoft's 1989 Mega Drive classic *Herzog Zwei* is technically the first real-time strategy game, it was Westwood's *Dune II* that really got the ball rolling and laid down the rules that would shape the genre for years to come.



Battle Isle

Released: **1991**
Publisher: **Blue Byte Software**
Developer: **In-House**

This turn-based tactics game was apparently inspired by PC-Engine title *Military Madness*. Fighting across a hexagon-filled map, the player must obliterate their opponent's HQ in order to achieve victory.



Sim City

Released: **1989**
Publisher: **Maxis/EA**
Developer: **Maxis**

Although it was not developed primarily for PC, *Sim City* achieved great fame on the format, via its initial conversion and subsequent sequels. The PC's mouse interface was ideally suited to this kind of title.



X-Com: Enemy Unknown

Released: **1993**
Publisher: **MicroProse**
Developer: **Mythos Games**

Julian Gallop's spiritual sequel to his 8-bit *Rebelstar* and *Laser Squad* games, *X-Com* was a turn-based tactical war game where the player controlled a team of battle-hardened soldiers investigating a series of visitations from hostile aliens. *X-Com* took Gallop's turn-based template and refined it to near-perfection.



Sid Meier's Civilization

Released: **1991**
Publisher: **MicroProse**
Developer: **Sid Meier/ MicroProse**

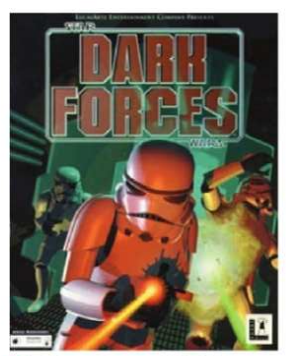
The epic *Sid Meier's Civilization* attempted to distil nearly six thousand years of human evolution and technological development into just a few floppy disks, and, as the many people who lost vast chunks of their lives to its charms will attest, it succeeded with aplomb. Military concerns, agriculture, diplomacy… it had everything covered.

developers. Firms such as Sierra On-Line, MicroProse, Origin Systems, Electronic Arts, Sir-Tech, Activision, Infogrames, Blue Byte and SSI all flocked to support the format, many of whom had previously dabbled with the Apple II, C64 and other home micros. However, a new breed of developer was emerging, one that had cut its teeth on the PC and would go on to push the format to its limits.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO talk about the formative years of PC gaming without hitting upon the topic of shareware. A phrase originally coined by Microsoft employee Bob Wallace, shareware titles were essentially expanded game demos that offered the end user the chance to sample the product in question before making a purchase. However, what made these programs different from traditional demo discs was that they were being manufactured by fledgling software companies that simply didn't have the distribution channels to get their product on shop shelves. Companies such as id Software, 3D Realms (then Apogee Software) and Epic (originally Epic Mega Games) all started out producing shareware, but from these humble beginnings they went on to revolutionise the gaming industry forever.

Apogee Software released what is generally deemed to be the first shareware PC game in 1987. Entitled *Kingdom Of Kroz*, it was published in episodes, the first of which was given free of charge. And herein lies one of the key differences between shareware games and demos: shareware essentially gave you a full gaming experience, whereas a game demo might only show a small snapshot of what a game was like. This became known as the 'Apogee Model' of distribution and was taken up by several other small developers at the time.

Apogee followed *Kroz* with such titles as *Supernova*, *Night Bomber* and *Asteroid Rescue*, but it was the decision to distribute games made by other developers that took the company to new heights. In 1990 Apogee published the first episode of id Software's *Commander Keen*, a highly playable 2D platformer



As PC power increased, the FPS rose to prominence, with developers like LucasArts shifting focus accordingly.



PCs infiltrated the home under the guise of usefulness, but quickly became a great source of fun instead.

TOP FIVE ADVENTURE/RPG

Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge

Released: **1991**
Publisher: **LucasArts/US Gold**
Developer: **LucasArts**



All of LucasArts' pre-Win95 point-and-click adventures are worth playing, but this one is arguably the best. Gorgeous visuals and superlative music are combined with a wonderful plot and a hilarious script. Several sequels later, the brilliant *Monkey Island* series is yet to reach the same heights as this classic.

Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth Of Worlds

Released: **1993**
Publisher: **Origin Systems/EA**
Developer: **Looking Glass Technologies**

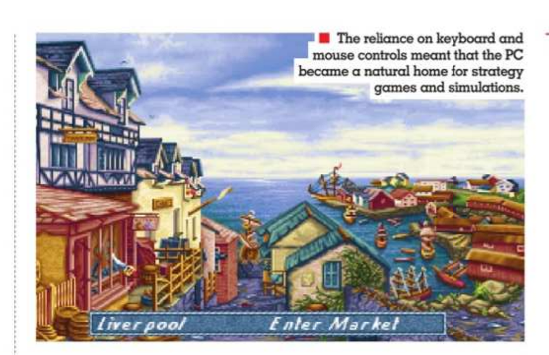
Developed by the now-defunct Looking Glass Technologies, *Labyrinth Of Worlds* was the second *Ultima* title to adopt the first-person viewpoint, following on from 1992's *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*. Compared with rival role-playing games of the time, *Ultima Underworld II* was like experiencing the future.



with relatively basic EGA graphics. It was a huge success but few could have foreseen the massive impact the developer's future projects would have on the PC gaming landscape. *Wolfenstein 3D* followed, introducing thousands of PC owners to the wild and frenetic world of first-person shooters. It was then superseded by *Doom* and later *Quake*, two franchises that set the entire videogaming world alight. id went on to become a household name, and yet it all started with low-budget shareware games.

id Software's *Doom* proved to be one of the most influential videogames of the decade, and even got a mention in the massive US sitcom *Friends*. However, it was hugely significant in another way, too – it introduced many to the concept of playing videogames online. Although the principle was certainly not a new one in 1993, by the time *Doom* was released, modem technology was advanced enough to allow people to play more complex and visceral games than were previously possible. The notion of a multiplayer deathmatch – a feature that is rarely absent from modern first-person shooter titles, regardless of platform – was popularised by *Doom* and serves as yet another example of how PC gaming has indelibly left its mark on modern gaming trends.

ARGUABLY THE ZENITH of the DOS era of PC gaming came with the arrival of the Intel 486 chip. Prior to the release of the Intel Pentium, which effectively heralded the era of Windows 95 and the CD-ROM revolution, many hardcore PC gamers upgraded to the 486 model. Its additional processing power provided the ideal platform to play host to some truly stunning games. Companies such as Origin Systems, Digital Image Design and Bullfrog pushed the hardware to its very limits with titles like *Magic Carpet* and *Strike Commander*. Indeed, the latter even gained an infamous reputation for being practically unplayable on anything other than a cutting-edge, top-of-the-line machine.



The reliance on keyboard and mouse controls meant that the PC became a natural home for strategy games and simulations.

ID SOFTWARE'S DOOM PROVED TO BE ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL GAMES OF THE DECADE

The 486 range was the last PC to exclusively rely on MS-DOS as an operating system. After forming the bedrock of the PC operating system for what seemed like forever, DOS was finally put out to pasture when Microsoft launched its Windows 95 operating system, bringing to an end an era plagued by technical frustrations but also packed with legendary gaming moments. Win95 was the first step towards freeing PC owners from the shackles of the command-line interface, and by the time it hit the market, CD-ROM drives were also becoming commonplace. Floppy disk games were slowly but surely dying out and the imminent emergence of graphic accelerator cards drove PC gaming even further into the exciting world of 3D visuals. While many PC gamers shudder when you talk about the DOS era, there's no denying that it boasted some truly stunning examples of videogame design, and for all its frustrations and problems it proved to be a fantastically rewarding time for those willing to make the effort.

Ultima VII: The Black Gate

Released: **1992**
Publisher: **Origin Systems**
Developer: **In-House**



Ultima VII: The Black Gate is often regarded as the pinnacle of Richard 'Lord British' Garriott's long-running role-playing game franchise because it offered a massive, non-linear game world that was so packed with detail that it took hours to explore. So in-depth was the game engine that players could bake bread, make clothes and perform other tasks.

Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers

Released: **1993**
Publisher: **Sierra On-Line**
Developer: **In-House**



While LucasArts busied itself making excellent adventure titles that would have us splitting our sides with laughter, Sierra On-Line took the more intellectual approach with most of its own games, and the *Gabriel Knight* series was up there with the best. A simultaneous floppy disk and CD release saw Tim Curry providing his voice for the latter format.

Lands Of Lore: The Throne Of Chaos

Released: **1993**
Publisher: **Virgin Interactive**
Developer: **Westwood Studios**



While its 2D viewpoint was improved upon by *Ultima Underworld II*, Westwood's *Lands Of Lore* nevertheless provided a captivating role-playing adventure. Based on the company's *Dungeons-&-Dragons*-licensed *Eye Of The Beholder* titles, *LOL* featured stunning artwork that still looks positively sumptuous today.

TOP FIVE OTHERS

Jazz Jackrabbit 1994



Before Epic Games started churning out an endless stream of macho FPS titles, the company's most famous achievement was a green rabbit with a laser gun. The closest thing PC owners ever got to having their own Sonic or Mario title, *Jazz Jackrabbit* was a highly accomplished platforming title.

Star Wars: X-Wing 1993



There were hundreds of flight simulators released for the PC so it might seem strange that we've picked one that is set in space. However, when it was released, *Star Wars: X-Wing* had console owners picking their jaws off the ground for weeks afterwards.

Commander Keen 1990



Before *Wolfenstein* and *Doom* there was *Commander Keen*. Despite the crude EGA visuals, this was a highly playable platforming title that borrowed elements from console games of the same ilk but added its own unique spin. A real cult classic.

Alone In The Dark 1992



The series may have been driven into the ground lately, but *AITD* was once truly groundbreaking and, despite what Capcom claims, marked the start of the survival-horror genre.

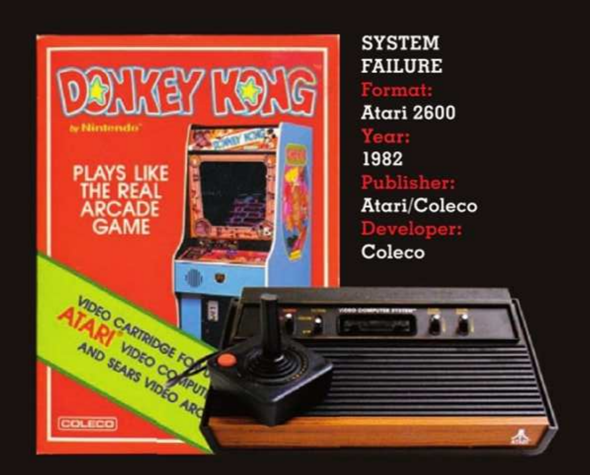
IndyCar Racing 1993



One of the first racers to use texture mapping, *IndyCar Racing* so impressed *Formula One Grand Prix* creator Geoff Crammond that he decided to implement the feature in *GP2*. Played with a steering wheel, this was astonishingly good.

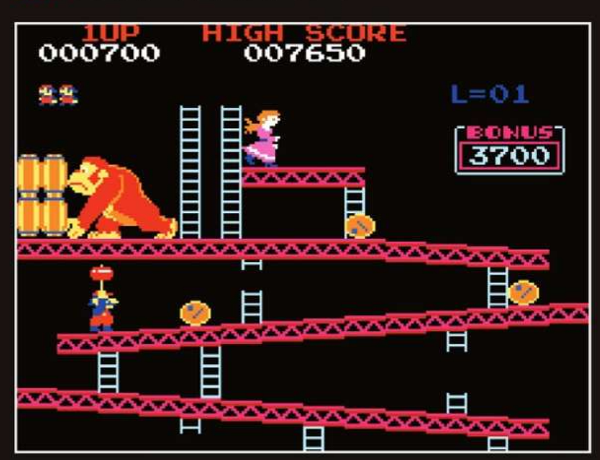
The world's most embarrassing arcade ports, under the spotlight

CONVERSION CATASTROPHE DONKEY KONG



SYSTEM FAILURE
Format: Atari 2600
Year: 1982
Publisher: Atari/Coleco
Developer: Coleco

THE HYPE

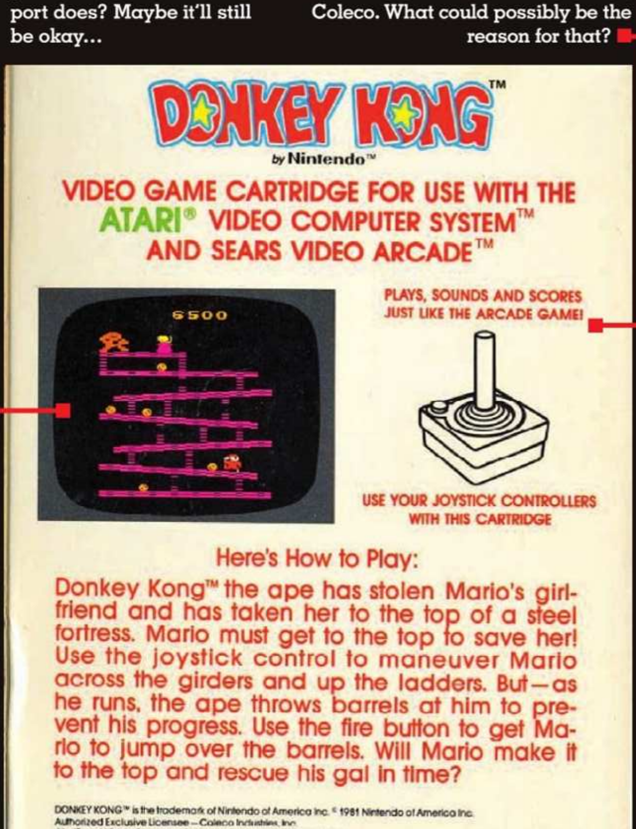


IN THE GAMES industry's formative years, arcade conversions were king, and the company with the best home conversion of that year's biggest coin-op hit raked in the most Christmas cash. In 1982, the most anticipated game of the year was Nintendo's *Donkey Kong*, and the big three American consoles – Atari 2600, Colecovision and Intellivision – all boasted an 'arcade perfect' version of the Mario game. A fierce bidding war had taken place between Atari, Coleco, and, oddly, Taito for the conversion rights and it was Coleco that walked away with the licence. All three US console versions were then developed by Coleco, but which one was the worst? Definitely not the Colecovision port, obviously.

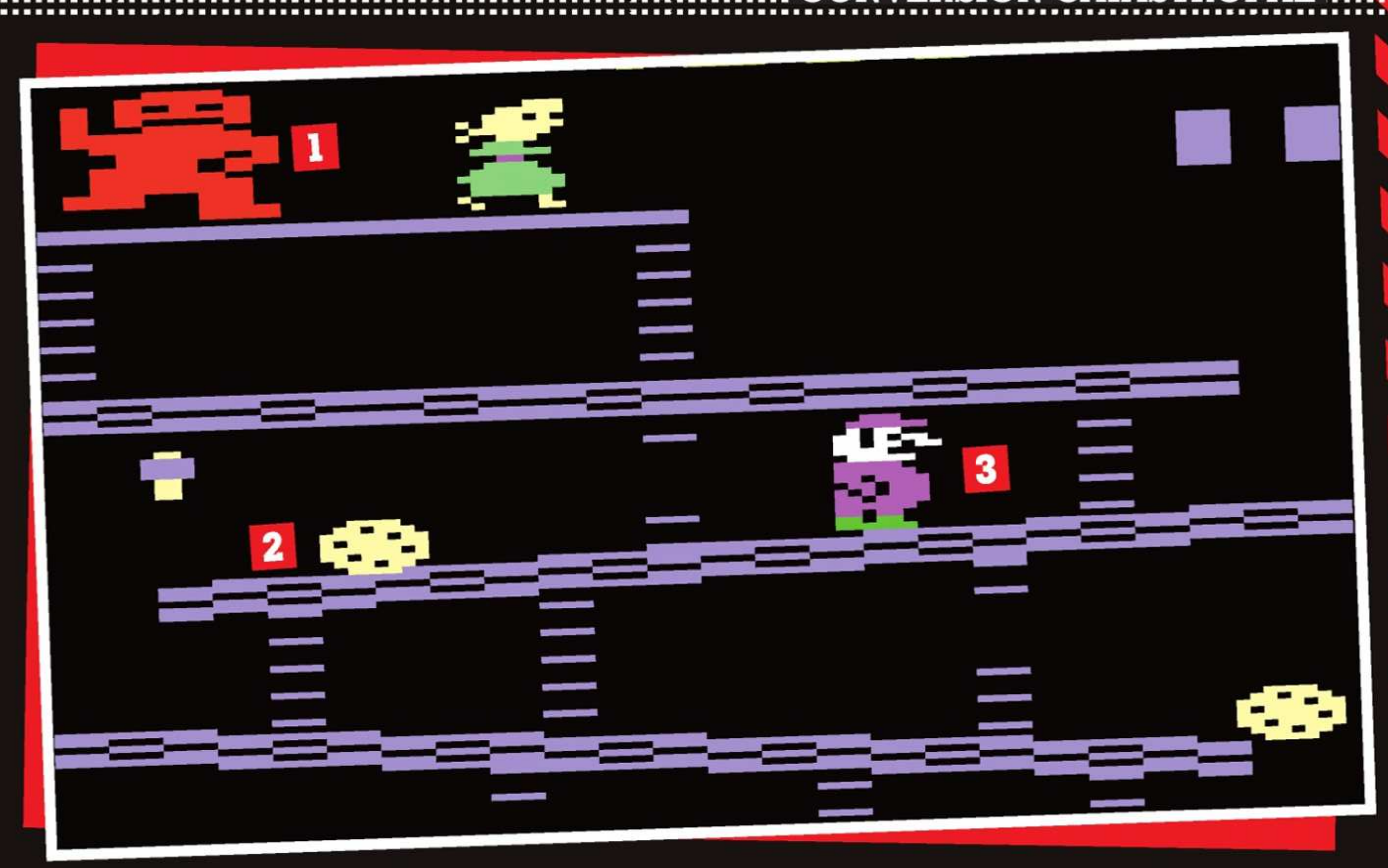
THE WARNING SIGNS

Well, it doesn't look exactly like the arcade game, but then what 2600 port does? Maybe it'll still be okay…

"Plays, sounds and scores just like the arcade game." Hmm, suspicious omission of the word 'looks' there, Coleco. What could possibly be the reason for that?



All three competing versions were made by Coleco, owner of the Colecovision. Surely it wouldn't make the other version worse than its own. Would it?



THE REALITY

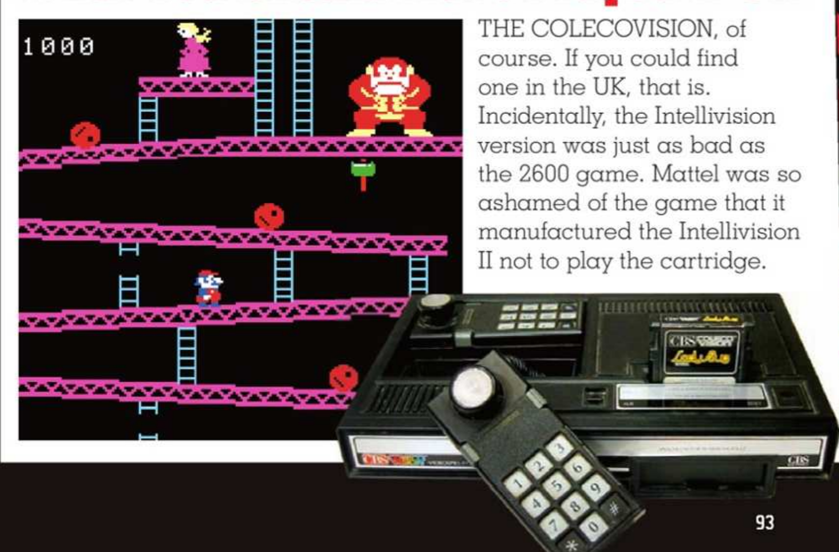
The Atari 2600 *Donkey Kong* doesn't *play* that badly. It's functional and anyone who's played the arcade game will recognise the controls. However, Donkey Kong looks like a badly thought-out Digitizer character. The rival Colecovision version looked far better and much closer to the arcade source. The Colecovision version was packaged with every console and became one of the first killer app pack-ins, while the Atari version joined *Pac-Man* as yet another conversion catastrophe. Could it be coincidence that the Colecovision version was the best, or was it simply down to the technical limitations of the 2600? No one knows, but rumours persist that Coleco sabotaged the Atari and Intellivision ports to make its own console look superior.

1 This is clearly supposed to be Donkey Kong himself, but it looks more like a cross between the Honey Monster and a gingerbread man to us. Surely the Atari 2600 could spare more than one colour for him…

2 The confectionary theme continues with barrels that look a bit too much like giant chocolate chip cookies, for our liking. Why make Mario jump over them when he could just eat his way through them?

3 We know the classic look of Mario hadn't been finalised at this stage but, come on, we could probably do better than this effort if all we had was DS's Pictochat and a broken stylus.

What You Should Have Played It On



THE COLECOVISION, of course. If you could find one in the UK, that is. Incidentally, the Intellivision version was just as bad as the 2600 game. Mattel was so ashamed of the game that it manufactured the Intellivision II not to play the cartridge.





■ The physical presentation of the stages changed in reflection to the player's performance. U rappin' AWFUL!

BEHIND THE SCENES

PARAPPA THE RAPPER

From Guitar Hero to Space Channel 5, games™ is a huge fan of rhythm-action games. So when we were given the opportunity to speak with the creative minds behind the grandad of the genre, we naturally jumped at the chance. Read on to find out how the influential PaRappa the Rapper came to be…





Release: 1996
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Sony
Developer: NanaOn Sha

KEY STAFF:
Masaya Matsuura (producer, composer)
Rodney Alan Greenblat (lead artist, designer)
Gabin Ito (story writer)

WHENEVER GAMES™ INTERVIEWS the developer of a classic game there are usually a number of stock questions at hand. Did you ever expect the game to be a success? What was the hardest part of development? That sort of thing. They're the kind of questions that have to be asked but, as the interviewer, you never expect anything other than an appropriately stock response in return. So imagine our surprise when we asked Masaya Matsuura how he felt about the public reaction to *PaRappa The Rapper*'s European release in 1997 only to hear him burst into laughter at the very thought that anyone here had even noticed the existence of his game.

Maybe the original release never actually sold that well to begin with or maybe it's just that Matsuura has only concentrated on the reaction in his native Japan, but we feel the need to point out the fact that *PaRappa*'s European debut definitely turned a few heads. As well as introducing the world to the concept of rhythm-action before the term had ever been coined, *PaRappa* also made use of a cast of lovable personalities and a paper-like visual style that immediately set it apart from the generic 3D platformers and first-person shooters of the day.





AN ADHERENCE TO REAL-WORLD LOGIC WOULD ONLY HAVE HAMPERED THE GAME'S DESIGN







■ Would you take driving lessons from an irritable moose? It doesn't seem to bother our lyrically minded hero.





■ Rapping your way to the front of the queue to a toilet? Yes, it is still one of the best scenes ever to appear in a videogame.









FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

SLY REFLEX

A sad but true story. Me and my friends at the time used to dub our own words into the raps. As you can imagine, when you let a teen kid free with catchy tunes and severe obscenities the fun just get multiplied fivefold. When Chop Chop Master Onion goes from rapping about self defence to molesting sheep and crapping his pants, you just know that laughs are never far away.

ONTHINICE

PaRappa The Rapper could never of been made by a western studio, its a great example of Japanese quirkiness (which is mostly lost on me) hitting the nail on the head. Its hilarious, has amazing characters and is bat shit bonkers. About as a charming game as your likely to find

CRAYMEN EDGE

I wish I had a better sense of rhythm, I could never get past the Flea Market level. I'm only slightly ashamed to admit I have the soundtrack on my mp3 player.

RICHHOYLE24

M I X the flour into the bowl!!. The toilet level used to give me nightmares!! I wish rapping driving instructers were real

MERMAN

One of the few genuine car boot bargains I've ever bought... a superb combination of music and gameplay, got to love its unique style.

ANDY KUROSAKI

A brilliant game, catchy music, insane storyline, a real joy to play. "Kick, punch, it's all in the mind" indeed...

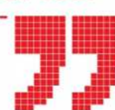


■ Design sketches were faxed to Japan in black and white and the numbers represent the colours that Greenblat intended for the final game.

WHAT THEY SAID...

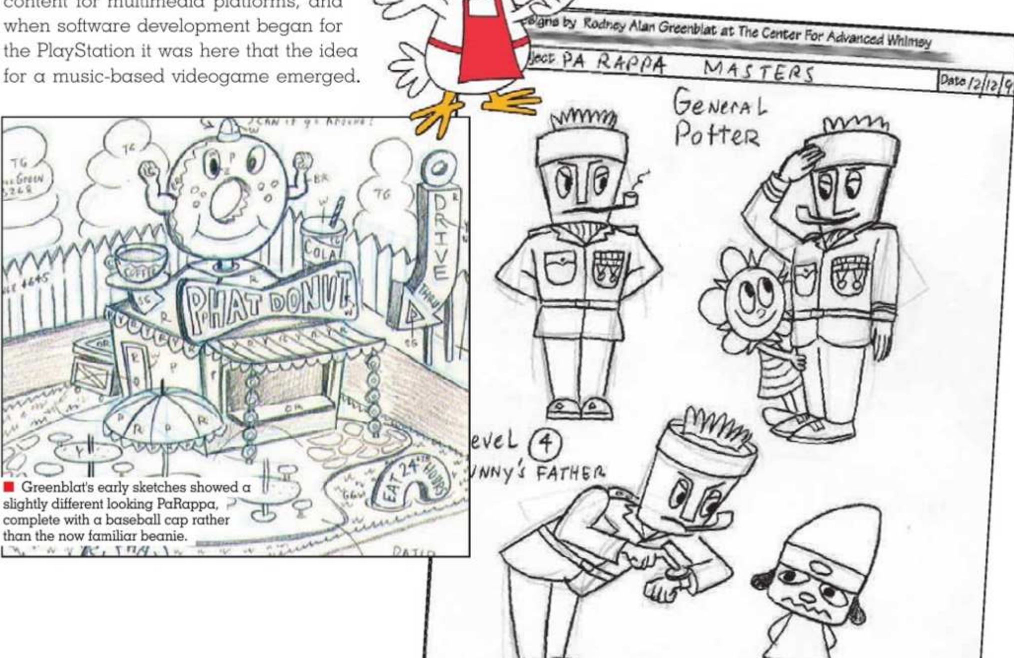
As a party game, *PaRappa The Rapper* is top notch. It is totally hilarious when you have the cheesy cartoon hip-hop pumped up loud and people get into difficulties trying to follow the lyrics in time.

Play, Issue 24, September 1997



This unique blend of audio and visual elements came from an unusual collaboration between New York-based artist Rodney Greenblat, and Japanese musician Masaya Matsuura. Though originally from opposite points of the globe, Matsuura and Greenblat both found themselves employed by Sony Japan around the same time, yet neither of them initially worked in the videogame division. Greenblat, an artist from the age of three, had been working in Japan in 1994 when Sony Creative Products asked him to design cute characters for licensed stationary sets. At the same time, Matsuura worked for Sony Music Entertainment, providing musical content for multimedia platforms, and when software development began for the PlayStation it was here that the idea for a music-based videogame emerged. Matsuura was familiar with Greenblat's previous illustration work and when he found out that they worked for the same company, he approached him about designing the game's characters.

Choosing to work in his own New York studio for the duration of *PaRappa*'s production, Greenblat would occasionally visit Japan to talk with Matsuura and Gabin Ito, the game's writer, before returning to design characters and fax them back to the development team. "The internet was too slow in 1995," we're told. These initial concepts were the seeds from which the final *PaRappa* game would grow, since the story and songs could



■ Greenblat's early sketches showed a slightly different looking PaRappa, complete with a baseball cap rather than the now familiar beanie.



PARAPPA'S STYLE IMMEDIATELY SET IT APART FROM THE GENERIC 3D PLATFORMERS AND FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS OF THE DAY

not be written without knowledge of the characters.

"Matsuura and Ito gave me suggestions for the personalities of the characters they needed and I made rough sketches that they would choose from," recalls Greenblat. "Some of the characters, PJ Berri, Katy Kat, Sunny Funny, were from my earlier product design endeavour with Sony Creative, and were then incorporated into the game. Those characters basically became the stylistic starting point for the *PaRappa* world. Sometimes my character designs inspired the writers to change the script and the story. The drawings I did of Chop Chop Master Onion gave them a lot of ideas," he continues.

With these four characters, Greenblat had already created a rather warped and eclectic theme for *PaRappa* – two of the characters were anthropomorphic animals, the third a talking sunflower and the fourth an onion – but Greenblat asserts that an adherence to real-world logic would only have hampered the game's design. "The world of cartoon reality is totally open," he says. "There are no limitations there, no gravity, weather, biology, logic or conditions of any kind. It is a fluid world where everything co-exists in total harmony and disharmony. It's useless to question what's possible in the cartoon world, and therefore beautiful."

The designs of the supporting characters may have come from abstract doodles but when it came to the title character, Greenblat instantly knew what kind of design to go for. "Matsuura wanted a character that was trustworthy, loyal, hardworking, romantic and a little insecure," he explains. "That made me think of a dog so I made several sketches of dog rapper characters. His body shape was inspired by Sunny, Katy and PJ who already existed, because I wanted the dog character to fit with them. Originally he had a baseball cap, and also a Rasta hat, but the knit cap was the best." Of the frog that's emblazoned on PaRappa's hat, however, Greenblat knows of no specific reason why it was included in the design, and admits that it just appeared during the sketching process. As for the backgrounds, which played an important part in PaRappa's amusing cut-scenes, Greenblat's designs originated from a similarly familiar source as the lead character. "An artist's inspiration comes from a whole lifetime of study, awareness and sensitivity to the world," he points out. "My own suburban upbringing probably had a lot to do with the way PaRappa Town looks, but at the same time it doesn't look much like Daly City, California or Bethesda, Maryland, the places I grew up."

The overall look of the game – the flat, paper-thin characters in a three-dimensional world – was an idea inspired by Greenblat's sketches, but is a decision that must ultimately be credited to Matsuura. "I draw in a very flat way. I've never been too concerned about perspective or shading," says Greenblat of his character designs. Matsuura adds: "I didn't feel they would translate well through sprite animation – perhaps because of their simple style. However, at the time, PlayStation was pushing the boundaries in



Lasting Legacy

■ It's not entirely inaccurate to think of Masaya Matsuura as the father of the rhythm-action genre, so who better to ask for an opinion on the last ten years of music games? "I feel very proud that the genre has continued to grow into the success that it is today," he answers. "However, I think that it is only recently, with the emergence of such titles as *Guitar Hero*, that we are truly seeing some of the more interesting titles of the genre. I think a lot of *PaRappa*'s descendents failed to keep true to the notion that music is fun, which is

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Rhythm action games really didn't exist before *PaRappa*. But Matsuura had at least produced a previous music game in the form of *Tunin' Glue*.



A whole wave of *PaRappa* imitators followed, including Enix's underrated *Bust A Groove*, until the genre reached its zenith in EA's *Rock Band*.





■ *PaRappa*'s cast of zany characters set it aside from practically any other PlayStation game and ensured that it stayed in the memory of all who played it.

Dog gone

■ Though it has received one official sequel, a PSP remake and spin-off in the form of *UmJammer Lammy*, demand remains high among fans for NanaOn Sha to produce another game in the *PaRappa* series. Matsuura tells us that he would love to create a third *PaRappa* game while Greenblat adds: "*PaRappa*'s release on PSP is exciting and I am hoping some new interest from the public will inspire Sony to do something new." Sadly, neither Sony nor Matsuura is willing to officially confirm a sequel, although the NanaOn Sha website does ominously claim that the developer is hard at work on "the next in the series of our hit family game". Finally, Greenblat reveals that, "there are some game projects cooking in Japan that I may be involved in, but I really don't know what will happen." Intriguing stuff.

3D expression, and as such I decided to take a balanced approach to *PaRappa* through using a mixture of 3D animation with Rodney's 2D drawings." And so, *PaRappa*'s unique visual style was born. In an age when most developers seemed ready to jump on the 3D bandwagon without ever stopping to think if it was actually the appropriate thing to do or not, this disregard for modern trends gave *PaRappa The Rapper* one of the most distinctive visual identities of the 32-bit era. "Matsuura and I both love to go against the conventional," says Greenblat with a keen awareness of just how much his game defied expectations of the time.

When it comes to subverting expectations, *PaRappa*'s visual style tells only half the story. It's the gameplay concept itself that would forever change the videogame medium. Ten years on, we almost take it for granted that the combination of music and timed button presses is one of the most natural ways for a videogame to entertain, but back in 1996 the idea was virtually unheard of. Up until that point, videogames had only asked a limited set of objectives of the player: blast the aliens, rescue the princess, cross the finish line. But *PaRappa* took a much more down-to-earth activity – the physical appreciation of music – and transplanted it into videogame form, creating a new genre at the same time.

It's easy to say now that this creative birth could only have come about in the mid-Nineties, once the CD-ROM revolution allowed for the use of multiple audio files in a single game, but it is as much a cultural shift as a technological one. It was only once the PlayStation entered the market that videogames really began to attract the attention of mainstream and casual audiences and with the 32-bit scene aligned so closely with the music industry – as with *WipEout* and its appropriation of club culture – the time was just right for a game to bring the two together and present itself in a way that appealed to the casual market as well as hardened gamers.

For Matsuura, the birth of the rhythm-action genre through *PaRappa* was a natural product of his background in both music and technology. "By 1996, I had already spent ten years as a professional sound artist as part of a duo with a female singer," he says with reference to his band, PSY•S, which recorded 13 full-length albums between 1985 and 1996. "Previously to that I had been a musician for 15 years, including five years as an amateur synthesizer player. Therefore I believe that it was this wealth of musical experience that ultimately led to my creation of *PaRappa The Rapper* – and indeed the rhythm-action game genre."

When the time came to write *PaRappa*'s songs, Matsuura worked from Greenblat's designs and Ito's story to come up with the lyrics but had to call in some extra help once the decision was made to record all of the songs in English,



even in the Japanese release. "I composed half of the songs used in *PaRappa*, and the rest were composed by various other composers," he reveals. "I also used a professional rapper to help with the English expressions of various lyrics and the lines within the game's script. He basically created the style of the lyrics and rhyme." For the voice talent behind the main characters, Matsuura turned to several New York-based vocalists. Although none of these can be described as superstars within the music business, it's hard to deny that the likes of 'Dred Foxx' (PaRappa) and 'Lenky Don' (Prince Fleaswallow) provided brilliant, memorable vocal tracks that are fondly remembered in their own right, regardless of the game itself.

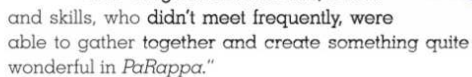
Being the trailblazer of a new genre does mean that your game will eventually seem dated next to its future equivalents, though, and it's *PaRappa*'s relatively tiny selection of just five songs that most dates it today. Matsuura maintains however that five was the maximum number of tunes that could possibly have been included at the time. "Each song in *PaRappa* had to have four variations, enabling it to switch between them at any point within the game," he explains. "Therefore even though the player may not feel that each song is of great length, in reality the tracks are quite extensive due to the need for the various changes in them according to the state of the player's performance. For this reason there was no room at all for any additional songs on the game. In fact, we had to throw away a whole stage in the middle of development," he adds.

PARAPPA WAS THE PRODUCT OF MATSUURA'S BACKGROUND IN MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY



MASAYA MATSUURA
Producer/composer

Although Matsuura was unable to fit everything that he wanted into the final release of *PaRappa*, he nevertheless remains extremely proud of the game. "I am always able to find parts that I feel could have been developed further with any of my past projects," he openly admits. "However, with *PaRappa* it has now become more than just a personal memory and if it was to be changed then it would inevitably become something completely different. Therefore, in a way I feel quite precious over *PaRappa* and our achievements in its creation." Never one to take all the credit for himself, Matsuura readily concedes that all the magical pieces of *PaRappa The Rapper* wouldn't have fallen into place were it not for the unique talents he had surrounded himself with. "My vision was always to work in a similar manner to a music band in that we would use our creative talents collectively," he says. "One of the greatest things about working on *PaRappa* was that we achieved a working practice very close to this. Everyone within the team worked very professionally, and nobody was afraid to push the boundaries, with everyone influencing each other. If I had to credit one person then I would probably look at the structure of the team and would specifically look at our official job titles and roles. However, in reality this wasn't how it worked as our roles were much more blurred and team focused. Overall, I am very proud that people of such a wide range of nationalities, tastes and skills, who didn't meet frequently, were able to gather together and create something quite wonderful in *PaRappa*."



As for Greenblat, his reflections on the finished game parallel Matsuura's concerns over the widespread popularity and impact of *PaRappa*. "I really loved the final piece, and I had no idea it was going to be such a big hit," he says in parting. "When I started getting royalties from it I was shocked." Well, at least one of them is convinced.







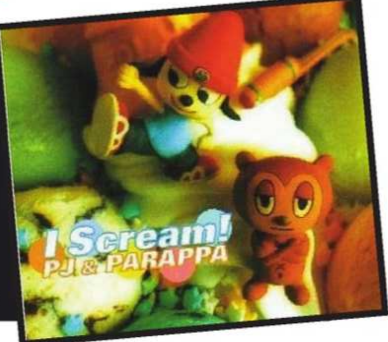
The *PaRappa* anime. Songs not included.

A wasted opportunity

As well as the many sequels and soundtracks spawned by the original game, *PaRappa The Rapper* also inspired a short-lived anime TV series. Featuring most of the main characters, the stories usually revolve around the same kind of social inadequacies that plague PaRappa during the cut-scenes of his games. These situations make for stories that are amusing enough but we can't help but be a little disappointed by this particular cartoon. The reason? Aside from the opening theme there are no actual songs used throughout the series. Tragically, Greenblat and Matsuura were tied up with the development of *PaRappa The Rapper 2* during the production of the anime and, contractually, were not allowed to work on it. Perhaps if they had, the series may have been better thought out.

I scream you scream

PARAPPA THE RAPPER stands out from most other rhythm-action games because of its use of original songs rather than existing popular music. It was a risky move to take but worked out brilliantly. Each song is now recognised as a classic in its own right, at least as far as videogame fans are concerned. So much so, in fact, that several soundtracks are available. A separate CD soundtrack was released concurrently with the game although this has now been made redundant as Sony has made the MP3s freely available through its official *PaRappa* website. More interestingly, a CD called *I Scream* was released in 1999. It features remixes of tunes from *PaRappa* spin-off *UmJammer Lammy* with additional vocals added by PaRappa's voice actor Dred Foxx.



VIEW TO A KILL: A HISTORY OF FIRST-PERSON RPGS



From Black Onyx to Oblivion, the first-person RPG has remained stubbornly true to its roots, whether appearing on consoles or computers, in America or in Japan. **games™** investigates one of the most entrenched sub-genres in the history of gaming

AS GAMES BECOME increasingly complex, certain staples of the industry struggle to remain relevant. A few, like the 2D platformer, are on life-support, while others are making major changes to their design in order to keep up with modern hardware. So it's curious that the first-person role-playing game (FPRPG) has not only weathered several console generations, it has also done so virtually unscathed? Although technology has improved dramatically in the last two decades, the genre has remained true to its roots. It is the shark of the gaming industry, almost exactly the same now as it was when it started. Admittedly, it has grown stale for some, but those with a fascination for seeking out treasure through deep and dangerous dungeons have always found a warm and dry home in the cold and wet darkness of modern gaming. Developers now incorporate every bell and whistle imaginable to make the experience look as real and as inviting as possible. This would ordinarily go hand-in-hand with the gameplay experience in any other game, but for some reason the FPRPG has kept itself virtually intact for all that time.

IN JAPAN I WAS TOLD THAT THE DUNGEON GENRE WAS DEAD AND WOULD NOT SELL

It has been a long and winding road, to say the least. Back when *Ultima: The First Age Of Darkness*, the first title of its kind, appeared in 1980, the simple, wireframe visuals were enough to enthral players into losing an endless number of potentially productive hours to Lord British's intriguing world. The first game in an ongoing and seemingly immortal series, *The First Age Of Darkness* introduced us to the Stranger - later known as the Avatar - who was tasked with saving the land of Sosaria from an evil wizard. With *Ultima*, Richard 'Lord British' Garriott and Origin Systems launched a classic series and spawned a genre, setting the groundwork for future classics, such as 1981's





TOP FIVE FPRPGS



5. Eye Of The Beholder

Though fairly linear, there's enough variety and challenge here to keep you playing until the end. A stellar entry in the classic line of Strategic Simulations Inc. games, it's a solid title and great fun for those just getting into the genre. There are many fans of the Mega CD version of this one, thanks to Yuzo Koshiro's incredible score.

4. Wizardry III: The Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord

Many RPG lovers have a soft spot for the original because it's as fun today as it ever was. The NES version is the most accessible now, but whatever happens you must play this. It spawned a genre and such games don't come along often.



1) 5 SKELETONS (5)

GIMLI'S OPTIONS

F)IGHT S)PELL P)ARRY
R)UN U)SE





3. Might & Magic II

Basic in execution but making up for it in both length and complexity, New World Computing's hit continued to bring fame to the *Might & Magic* name. It was ported to Sega Mega Drive, and provided they could get past the daunting hundred-page manual, 16-bit gamers were in for a great adventure and some surprisingly intricate character skill development.

2. Dungeon Master

This is one of the longest, most difficult games in the sub-genre. While there's nothing particularly complex about it – since it lacks many of the bells and whistles of the games that followed it – the distinct charm and the engaging quest make *Dungeon Master* a game that keeps you coming back. True fans of the genre have no doubt played this classic.





1. Shining The Holy Ark

Sega took everything that was great about *Shining In The Darkness* and sent it into overdrive by taking the adventure above ground. Brilliant presentation is complemented by multiple characters, which can be changed at any time, and a plot so big it had to be completed in *Shining Force III*. If you're a console dungeon crawler fan with a Saturn, get this now.

Wizardry: The Proving Grounds Of The Mad Overlord and 1985's *The Bard's Tale.*

■■■ **FOR THE MOST** part, FPRPGs were content to set up home on the computer, and Strategic Simulations Inc was a major force in the genre, releasing hit after hit, including *Pool Of Radiance* (1988) and *Eye Of The Beholder* (1990). New World Computing was another firm that left its mark when it introduced the *Might & Magic* series in 1986. But games began to infiltrate home consoles, like NES and Master System, and by the 16-bit era they were almost as fun with controllers as with a keyboard.

Wayne Holder's *Dungeon Master* immediately springs to mind. Originally inspired by Will Crowther's *Colossal Cave*, it was a major hit on PC and received ports to both SNES and Mega CD. One of the few titles for Sega's struggling CD add-on to use the Mega Mouse, it was still a far cry from the great experience the computer original offered. "The other problem with doing ports back then," Holder reveals, "was that most of the documentation for the Japanese consoles was written in Japanese, so we often had to experiment to figure out how things worked. With the addition of the CD unit, the Mega CD had two processors we could tap, but the things we had to do to shuttle data back and forth between the processors, and trying to make a sprite engine-based graphics subsystem behave like a bit-mapped screen, almost drove several of us to insanity. We gave it our best shot, but the end result fell short of what we wanted it to be."

The FPRPG genre was born on Western computers, and while it has remained popular there its reach in Japan has been great, perhaps even more so than in its home territories. The Japanese love RPGs, but it wasn't initially a match made in heaven. The game industry in Japan is primarily console-driven, and the plethora of PC titles that composed the bulk of FPRPGs weren't easy to swallow. Holder found this out first-hand when he attempted to bring *Dungeon Master* to Japan. "When I first went to Japan to try and license *Dungeon Master*," he recalls, "I was told over and over that **CONTINUED >.**

the dungeon genre was dead and would not sell there. But we struck a deal where we would do the code ports and JVC would handle marketing – a leap of faith on the part of the head of the JVC games group – and managed to get it on the market. It turned into a huge hit for us in Japan, and at one point we made far more money in Japan than we made elsewhere, due in part to the 'bubble' economy that was in full swing there at the time."

The differences between Eastern and Western RPGs aren't discernable just from glancing at screenshots; there are some deep contrasts in how the two styles play. Whereas Western entries tend to stick to a more *Dungeons & Dragons* style of gameplay – a characteristic stemming from the genre's pen-and-paper and later PC roots – Japanese games tend to focus more on storytelling and aren't as concerned with rules and complex character creation. FPRPGs are well known for their Western tendencies, and this has made them something of a niche in Japan. They're successful, and though they hardly achieve the sort of fame that games like *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* enjoy, those titles likely wouldn't be here had it not been for the first-person RPG. In fact, *Dragon Quest* creator Yuji Horii is said to have been inspired by both *Ultima* and *Wizardry* when he began work on his series.

RPGS IN JAPAN suffered a major division in style and scope during the late-Eighties, and those in the style of *Dragon Quest* continued to evolve, growing in popularity. FPRPGs didn't falter, however, and while the majority of console gamers were engrossed with their shiny new NES, Sega quietly released perhaps the greatest 8-bit RPG of all time, *Phantasy Star*. Only the dungeons themselves are in a first-person perspective, but they are done incredibly well and the pseudo-3D still holds up today. The famous franchise's first instalment introduced gamers to *Dark Force* (*Dark Falz* in the US translation), Meseta, and everything Laconian. This was the one you showed your friends, and it was a game that put petty concerns like food and rest into the lower tier of life's priorities.

Perhaps the most famous franchise to come out of the first-person dungeons of Japan is *Digital Devil Monogatari: Megami Tensei*. Spanning dozens of titles, the series' first-person roots date back to 1987 on NES. At least one game has appeared on seemingly every console ever made, and instalments are still released today, though they have long since abandoned their first-person roots.

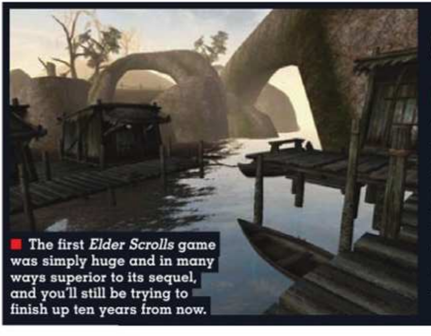
WE WANT THE ESSENCE OF OLD RPGS WITH MODERN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

FPRPGs pressed on, and by the introduction of Sega Saturn and PlayStation they had reached console hardware that could do them justice. Fans soon began to see titles that offered the complexity and depth that Western gamers had been experiencing on PC for years. Agetec enthralled players with its impressive *King's Field* duo, which intimidated players with dank caverns, haunting soundtracks, and 'one wrong step and you're dead' gameplay. In this regard, they recall those classic PC text adventures where one mistake results in horrible death. The adventure that awaited those brave enough to undertake it was both massive and rewarding.

For anyone looking for something a bit lighter in tone, Sega and Camelot Software Planning hit the spot with the delightful *Shining The Holy Ark*. The spiritual successor to the Mega Drive RPG *Shining In The Darkness*, *Holy Ark* featured rendered characters and multiple environments – a refreshing change for many players who were sick of only exploring underground dungeons. By 1996, Sega was throwing its fortunes behind the Saturn, and not satisfied with merely releasing a solid adventure that boasted beautiful visuals and an awesome quest, it went the extra mile by tying it into the overall *Shining* mythos, introducing characters and plot strands that would continue in the 1997 strategy-RPG *Shining Force III*.

THE ARRIVAL OF the next generation of consoles brought with it perhaps more FPRPGs than ever before. *Eternal Ring*; another *King's Field*; a new *Wizardry* title; and of course Bethesda's modern masterpiece, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. These more modern 3D games still adhere to the foundations set by *Ultima* and *Wizardry*, but if you're looking for a contemporary FPRPG that feels retro then handhelds are the way to go. Last year, GBA received a great game called *Mazes Of Fate*, which not only played like an FPRPG, but also retailed at just $20. Developer Graffiti Entertainment drew from both Eastern and Western RPG favourites for inspiration. "We love RPGs and we played and analysed almost all of the best RPGs of both past and current times," explained development head Javier Otaegui. "We tried to pick up the essence of the old RPGs but bring them to modern design principles. The titles that had a greater impact on the game are: *Lands Of Lore*, *Eye Of The Beholder*, *Chrono Trigger*, *Fallout*, *Final Fantasy*, and *Knights Of The Old Republic*."

More recently, DS has been host to *Etrian Odyssey*. Atlus forces the player to draw their own maps using the stylus, harking back to the days when these dungeon crawlers were played with a tablet of graph paper, lots of pencils, and a big eraser. Considering that the first sold well enough to warrant a sequel, it looks like there's still enough demand to keep the ancient FPRPG genre alive. It may be slow and cumbersome by nature, but the sales figures don't lie. Sometimes being out-of-date can be a very good thing indeed.



The first *Elder Scrolls* game was simply huge and in many ways superior to its sequel, and you'll still be trying to finish up ten years from now.

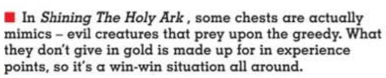
GOING UNDERGROUND

THE ASSUMPTION THAT the genre is locked underground is wrong. Early developers were limited not by their imaginations but by the sophistication of the hardware. Primitive computers and consoles set the barriers, and developers had to work within them. Consider this and the results we've enjoyed for 30 years are remarkable.

It is misleading to refer to these games as 'dungeon crawlers' as they're no longer confined to caves or dungeons. Powerful machines have brought a level of realism that wasn't possible before.

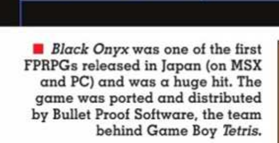
FPRPGs have endured the highs and lows of the games industry and flourished. The line between console and PC performance is blurring, and as home systems embrace DLC and hard drives, surely user-made content as a standard FPRPG feature isn't far off.




■ In *Shining The Holy Ark*, some chests are actually mimics – evil creatures that prey upon the greedy. What they don't give in gold is made up for in experience points, so it's a win-win situation all around.

■ We've always enjoyed Agetec's *King's Field* series, and this latest chapter is as hard and lengthy as the first two. Be prepared to die…often. Only the persistent need apply.




■ *Black Onyx* was one of the first FPRPGs released in Japan (on MSX and PC) and was a huge hit. The game was ported and distributed by Bullet Proof Software, the team behind Game Boy *Tetris*.

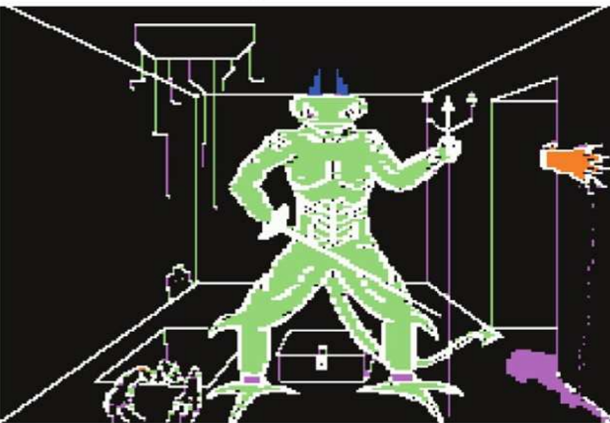


■ It's always nice for someone to see you off as you begin your adventure – take *Might & Magic II* (right), for example. You'll be too busy to search for his name for some time though.

■ *Eye Of The Beholder's* Displacer Beasts are nasty foes, but a good team is more than a match for them. *D&D* fans relished fighting classic monsters in the world under Waterdeep.







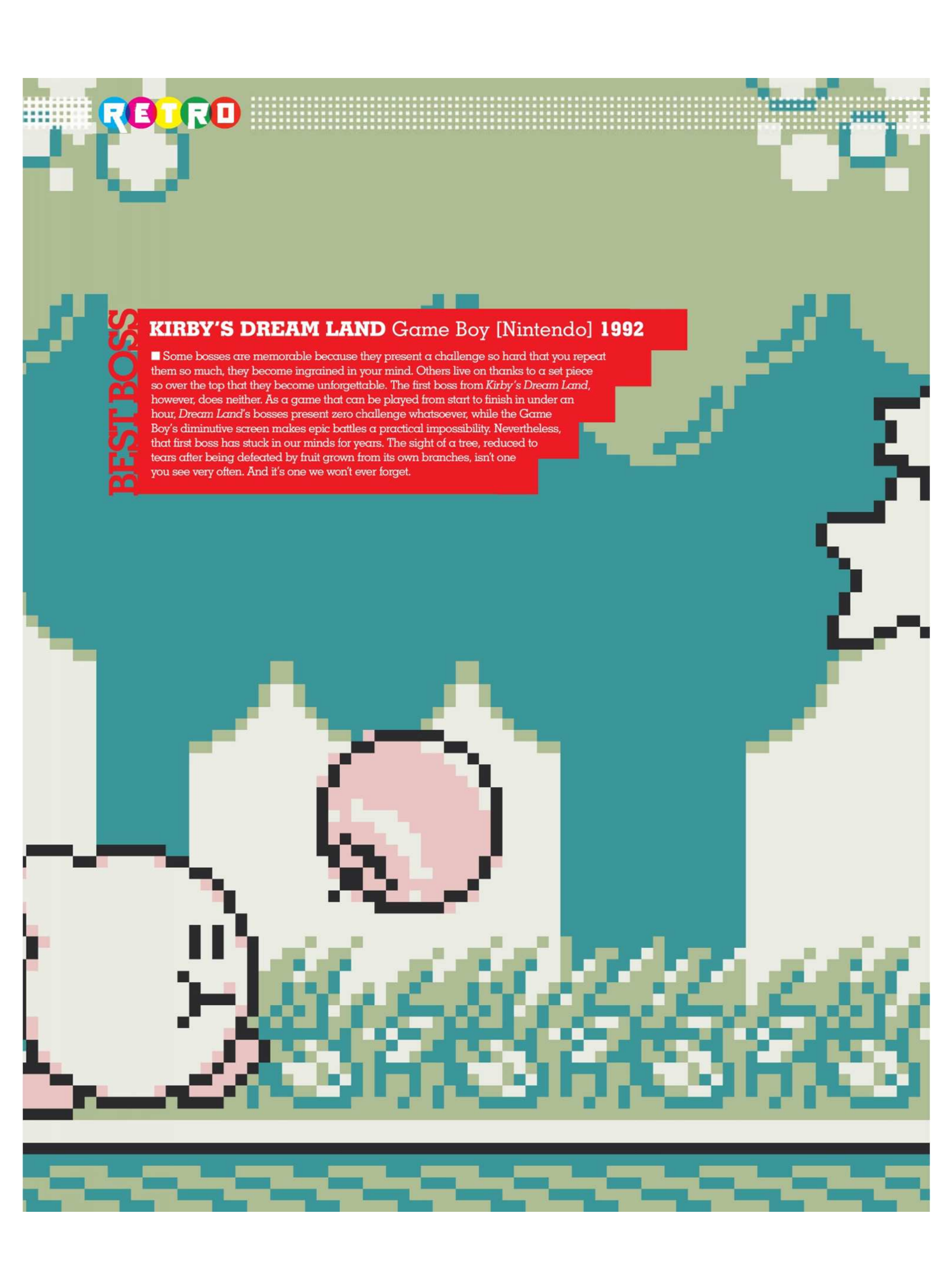


■ *Ultima* might look fairly simple now, but you wouldn't be playing any of the other games mentioned here if it hadn't stormed the trail first. It's still a solid, albeit short, adventure, even after all this time.

The Essential Console

■ IF WE'RE STRICTLY talking library size, then there's no doubt that PC is the undisputed king of first-person dungeon crawlers. A good portion of the games available might seem dated to some, but the fuss of getting them to run on Windows is minor (thanks, DOSBox), and the sheer volume and variety of games available is enough to keep any fan playing for months. It's true that many of the titles that originated on PC have been ported to consoles (like *Ultima III* and *Wizardry*) but few made the transition without suffering alterations to graphics, sound, or gameplay. Some were almost completely different to their computer counterparts. Moreover, the PC version almost always wins the comparison war due to the wonderful mod scene. User-based content is in ample supply for dozens of titles released over the years, giving them a future few console titles can hope to match.

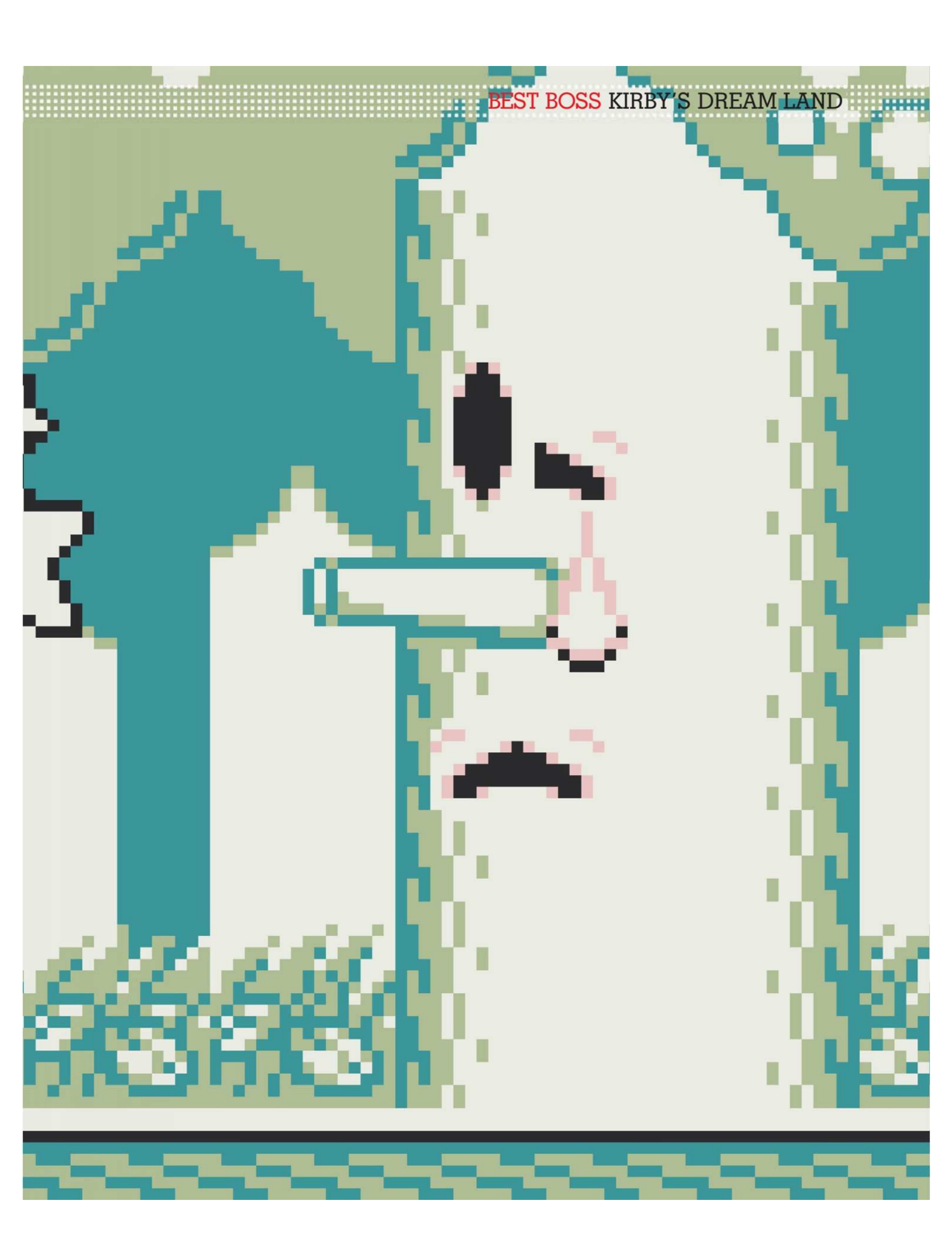
For that reason, if you're going to play them, stick to the PC originals where you can. The only downside here is finding complete copies of them, and many of the older ones use floppy discs – often more than one. The lucky few, such as *Wizardry*, have been rereleased, and it's perhaps a good idea to start with the most recent and inexpensive and work your way back. Others can be found for download on various subscription services, such as GameTap, which currently has *Might & Magic III-V* available. Examples include *Might & Magic III: Isles Of Terra, Eye Of The Beholder II: The Legend Of Darkmoon, Wizards & Warriors, Lands Of Lore,* and *Ultima Underworld.*



BEST BOSS

KIRBY'S DREAM LAND Game Boy [Nintendo] 1992

■ Some bosses are memorable because they present a challenge so hard that you repeat them so much, they become ingrained in your mind. Others live on thanks to a set piece so over the top that they become unforgettable. The first boss from *Kirby's Dream Land*, however, does neither. As a game that can be played from start to finish in under an hour, *Dream Land*'s bosses present zero challenge whatsoever, while the Game Boy's diminutive screen makes epic battles a practical impossibility. Nevertheless, that first boss has stuck in our minds for years. The sight of a tree, reduced to tears after being defeated by fruit grown from its own branches, isn't one you see very often. And it's one we won't ever forget.




RETRO

BINARY BELIEF

The 1982 movie Tron and the events surrounding its production consisted of binary extremes. Acute success and failure went hand-in-hand to create a bold new visual language for the culture of videogames…

What's particularly fascinating about the 1982 Disney film *Tron* is how its production not only followed the trends of the prolific, and highly unstable videogame industry far closer than those of the movie world, but it also progressed the realm of computer graphics and their applications quite profoundly. The impact of the movie and its remarkable special-effect techniques made little impression on the future of cinema, but did elevate expectations for the portrayal of cyberspace inhabited with active, decision-making entities – a concept abundant in contemporary videogames.

The character of *Tron* started life as a computer program that aspired to become human. In turn, the characters around him all had similar ambitions including the 'bit', which wanted to expand its possibilities and become a program. What's notable about scriptwriter Bonnie MacBird's first draft of the story is its similarity to the creation of Tron as a character. Tron was originally conceived as part of a demo video for Lisberger's new Boston-based animation studio, and was later sold to a radio station for a TV advertising campaign. The luminescent personality created by *Tron* director Steven Lisberger hurled two Frisbee-like discs out at the viewer, and caught them on their return in an anthropomorphic tribute to the first ever videogame, *Pong*. This 'electronic man', from which the character drew what was initially a nickname, was generated entirely using an animation-masking technique that caused selected areas of the screen to glow vividly and brightly – a method for which Lisberger had a particular affinity.

COMPUTERS WERE BEING used profusely for gaming in 1980, but no one envisioned the power processors of the time being put to use for entertainment purposes. The sheer cost and flippancy of such an endeavour verged on the ridiculous, and yet here was a filmmaker hoping to recruit the pinnacle of modern technology for the sake of a few movie scenes. This landmark coupling of two apparently far-removed industries was visionary, but were it not for the indivisible tie to videogames demanded by *Tron's* story, an alternative method of creating this virtual world would surely have been sought. As it was, Lisberger needed computers, and computers needed money. This meant his independent film was a nonstarter before the script's early draft stage. Serious Hollywood muscle was needed, but all he had to tout was a highly technical story – most movie execs had no concept of the game world – which required some radical filmmaking techniques to properly realise it. Fortunately, his passion for the project and the huge amounts of preliminary work designed to showcase the concept (such as demonstrations of the backlit animation and a first-class script from Bonnie MacBird) persuaded Disney to option a project about which they actually knew very little.

DISNEY WAS INTENT ON EXPLOITING EVERY POSSIBLE FACET OF VIDEOGAME CULTURE

Teaming up with The Mouse was yet another mixed blessing for *Tron*. Disney was in one of its trademark lulls, with very little in the way of new or exciting intellectual property to retain the fickle attention of kids, and therefore saw *Tron* as a potential marketing gold mine. While this promised a great number of benefits, such as a long life celebrated through t-shirts, lunch boxes and sequels; it also carried the millstone of stifling micromanagement. Fortunately, Disney stayed true to the traditions of Walt, and the animation powerhouse was all too eager to adopt new technologies – even if it meant another CONTINUED >.



Discs Of Tron

AN INSIGHT INTO HOW ONE TRON GAME BECAME TWO

THE FILM and the game each affected the content of the other. The 'grid bugs', seen briefly in the film during the Solar Sailer sequence, were only added in post-production as Midway had selected them from the script as a significant aspect of the coin-op action. For the sake of the massive following of *Tron* gamers, a small and ultimately ineffectual appearance of grid bugs was required on screen.

Similarly, Midway quite underestimated the appeal Flynn's first encounter on the game grid would have. The 'ring game', which was actually a brilliant physical representation of *Pong* (the inspiration behind *Tron*), was a highlight of the movie and silently explained the lives and tribulations faced by programs under the tyranny of the MCP.

Although Midway had developed a game version, it was dropped from the coin-op due to technical limitations. Realising later how important this *Pong* metaphor was, *Discs Of Tron* was released in its own right, though bizarrely missed the entire point of it being a beautifully realised *Pong* clone.

As seems to be the case with all things *Tron* (one of the areas where the film succeeded in representing the possibility and purpose of a living program) the game achieved only a graphical representation of two dudes awkwardly playing lacrosse.

eight rewrites of the script to the point at which Tron himself began to take a backseat to the action. While the majority of Disney cash-ins generally work toward cheapening a franchise, *Tron* was superbly prepped for the commodity it was born from: videogames. As Lisberger filled the production floor of the movie with coin-op cabinets to inspire the actors and crew, an equally large-scale development of tie-in games began. Future cult fans were set to be absorbed into the world of *Tron* exactly as Flynn would be in the movie.

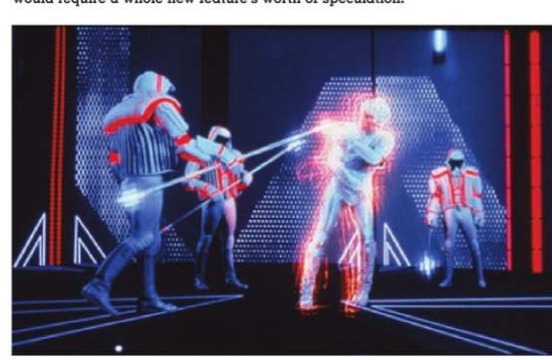
EARLY POSTERS AND publicity shots of *Tron* carried the perplexing slogan 'See the film. Play the game', clearly demonstrating Disney's intention to fully exploit every possibility this exploration of videogame culture could provide. Licensed to seasoned arcade expert Bally Midway, the coin-op counterparts were scheduled for a simultaneous release alongside the movie. At the time, an average of five people was more than enough to put an arcade game together, from software to cabinet design and side-art. In *Tron's* case, there were nearer 20.

True enough, much of this was due to acute time constraints and a vast marketing strategy hinging on a pair of complementary entertainment mediums permeating Eighties youth culture with all things *Tron*, but Lisberger's vast amount of pre-production work was just as relevant to game design as it was to a movie. The infectious enthusiasm from the filmmakers spilled over into the industry that knew *Tron* a whole lot better.

The coin-op was a masterpiece of electronic modelling. Sculpted from neon light, the cabinet was the most accurate physical representation of *Tron's* world outside a computer simulation. Pulsing with intricate detail and the living circuitry of Lisberger's imaginary world, seeing this monolithic gateway into the digital dimension infused players with a feeling of immersion never before felt in an arcade. The proprietary controller burned with blue lightning, while the bezel and marquee surged with the luminescent promise of entering the program's world.

There were four individual games, and Midway was forging a path through this new technological dawn with as much difficulty and trepidation as the filmmakers. For the big-screen production, breath

The limited colour palette made a strong impression on the design of *Tron's* costumes and sets. How a modern-day sequel might react to the last 25 years of gaming evolution would require a whole new feature's worth of speculation.



THE COIN-OP CABINET WAS A MONOLITHIC GATEWAY INTO THE DIGITAL DIMENSION

Special FX

HOW TRON'S CUTTING-EDGE EFFECTS TOOK SHAPE OVER A DECADE BEFORE THEY EVEN HIT THE SCREEN...

EVEN TO STEVEN Lisberger, the idea of using fully computer-generated environments, effects and characters hadn't occurred until he met with the passionate and animated computer scientist Alan Kay, who invented the Windows-style GUI and laptops. His vision for what computers were capable of took Lisberger Studio to several computer simulation experts who hadn't imagined their talents being put to use in entertainment.

Information International Inc (Triple-I), a software simulation company, had realised around a decade earlier that one of its models, which simulated the pattern of radiation should it escape from a reactor, could be easily adapted to trace the movements of another form of radiation: light.

By tracing simulated light from its source to an object, then its trajectory reflecting from the object, through a lens and into a virtual camera, they could create computer-generated imagery. To demonstrate this solution without a problem, Triple-I made a promotional video which, as it turned out almost ten years later, was exactly what *Tron* needed.

It also highlighted the astronomical costs involved with using computers in such a frivolous fashion. Ironically, much of the film's live-action effects were actually achieved by standard, hand-drawn animation and airbrushed background artwork.



DATABASE OF TRON

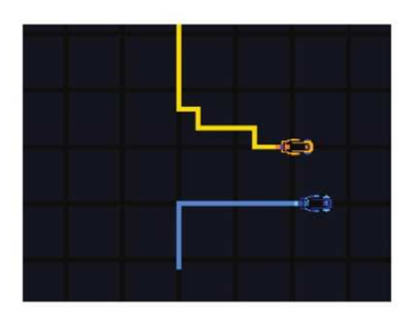
The various Tron titles over the years have hinted at a whole new world of possibility in videogame technology. But did its eventual adaptations live up to the promise? Here are a few to consider…

was perpetually baited since no preview – or even preconception – of what kind of footage would eventually come out of the supercomputers was available: they had to wait until the CGI scenes were finished and rendered. This meant an equally difficult task for the software team who were trying to create a potentially massive licence tie-in to a concept that no one – not even Lisberger – could actually envisage.

WORKING FROM A draft of the script and with the help of a computer scientist from Triple-I (the software company responsible for the *Solar Sailer*, MCP core and Sark's carrier ship film graphics) Midway's developers did their best to determine key points in the film, which would best translate to the arcade screen. While their success resounded throughout arcades on the build-up to the film's release, it was also one of the main reasons behind many of the film's mostly insignificant (if such a word exists in the vocabulary of cult fans) inconsistencies. *Tron's* world was governed by colour, and followed the established parameters set down by the recent *Star Wars* trend: good was bright blue while evil was a vivid, pinkish-red.

But the special effects were yet to be completed on the film set, and the process really didn't hinge on what colour film gel would ultimately be used to determine the circuitry glow of the characters. Midway took its best guess, and for the most part it was right. Tron, at least, was blue. Naturally, Midway assumed his Light Cycle would also be blue, and yet the film seemed to switch between colours at random (Tron's cycle, as it turned out, was yellow, while Sark's minions tore up the virtual highways in blue vehicles). While this kind of pedantry is barely worth consideration 25 years later, the success of the arcade front in Disney's cultural invasion was phenomenal, and for such a new and unexplored story concept, the film could afford little uncertainty.

Although Midway stretched the boundaries of 1982's electronic gaming capabilities, the inherent limitations actually provided the perfect counterpoint to the anthropomorphic movie versions of programs, sprites, bits and bytes. The point of *Tron* was to view life from the other side of the screen, so it's only reasonable that gamers should view CONTINUED >.



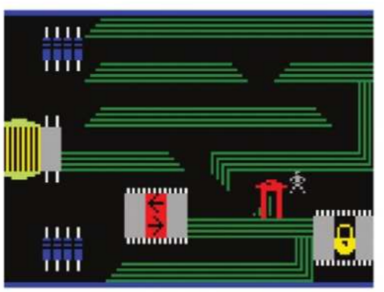
TRON [1982] ARCADE
This movie tie-in coin-op realised the *Tron* universe even better than the big-budget movie managed. And it saw a great deal more success to boot. When we think of *Tron*, this impressive cabinet is the first image our brain downloads.



TRON: DEADLY DISCS [1982] ATARI 2600
This was another game designed before anyone really knew what *Tron* was about. The colours are wrong and the all-important disc doesn't quite follow the behaviour of its movie counterpart, but the game in its own right is a pretty good dodgeball simulator.



ADVENTURES OF TRON [1982] ATARI 2600
Portraying the events of *Tron* as a platform videogame wasn't actually a completely terrible idea, although the storyline, graphics and 'run, jump and collect' gameplay mechanics differ greatly from the *Tron* we know and love today.



MAZE-A-TRON [1982] INTELLIVISION
This is pretty much the only game ever to cast the player in the role of Flynn, rather than Tron, which actually makes a lot of sense as Flynn is the main character of the film. Although the PCB scenery looks quite special, this is otherwise a boring platformer.



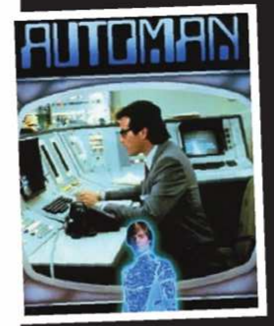
DISCS OF TRON [1983] ARCADE
Originally intended to be included in the first coin-op but dropped due to technical constraints, *Discs Of Tron* was admired for realising one of the most popular scenes, yet regrettably missed the point as a *Pong* clone.



TRON 2.0 KILLER APP [2003] PC, XBOX, GBA
Waiting 20 years for a *Tron* sequel was surprisingly worthwhile, and *Tron 2.0* – a critically acclaimed RPG/FPS – has since gone on to create a whole sub-culture who celebrate the thriving digital world created by Disney all those years ago.

Copy & Paste

Tron may not have realised its full box office potential back in 1982, but over the years it's garnered an impressive cult following. The messages, styles and stories have inspired the media in many areas…



AUTOMAN

A FAILED TV series from *Tron* producer Donald Kushner, *Automan* was a dire product of corporate thinking. Intended to capitalise on the *Tron* craze (which, in terms of visual media, never actually happened), the concept was to get a *Tron*-like character off the game grid and onto the mean streets solving crimes in contemporary Los Angeles. Cancelled after only 13 episodes, *Automan* does have some mild camp value, even if it's purely a demonstration of how not to do it.

BORIS F

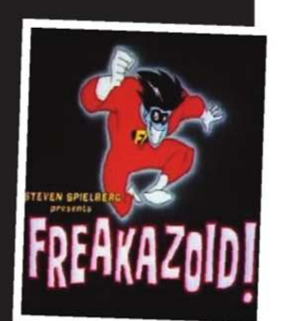


A GERMAN hacker best known by his pseudonym 'Tron', Boris F had dark computer talents that led to his cult recognition. During his illicit endeavours 'phreaking' phone networks and hacking communication-related systems, Tron discovered a way to apply voice encryption to ISDN telephone lines, a matter conspiracy theorists attribute to his suspicious death in 1998. Officially recorded as suicide, many people to believe foul play was involved.

JAY MAYNARD

KNOWN IN cyberspace as 'Tron Guy', computer programmer Jay Maynard shot to virtual fame when images of his homemade Tron costume hit the internet. Placing his abundant physique on show in the skin-tight electroluminescent suit was a great parody of the film. His notoriety led to costumed cameos on the *Jimmy Kimmel Live* show, as a guest in the We Are The Web music video and a host of appearances on websites and computer-related media.

FREAKAZOID!



IF EVER there was a modern reinterpretation of *Tron*, it has to be Freak*azoid!*. Taking the same principle of transporting a lonely computer type into the digital world he better understands, then imbuing him with the powers of the different realms as appropriate. Originally envisioned as a straight superhero adventure, *Freakazoid!* gradually mutated into zany kids' comedy – to the extent that the creator took his name off the programme. This alone harkens back to *Tron*'s production.



BETA TESTING: AN INTERVIEW WITH BONNIE MACBIRD

Writer of the first script and developer of the early characters based on Steven Lisberger's animation, Bonnie MacBird told us how the Tron program first ran…

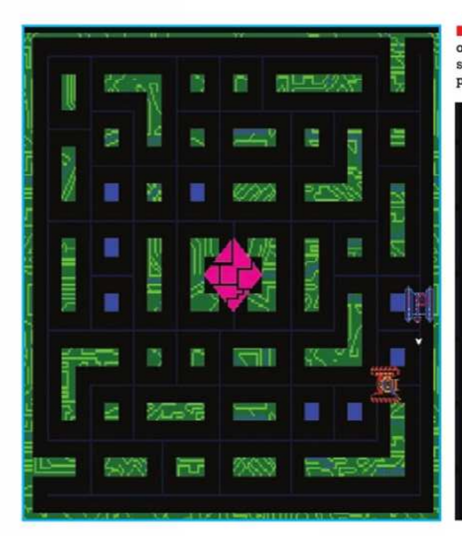


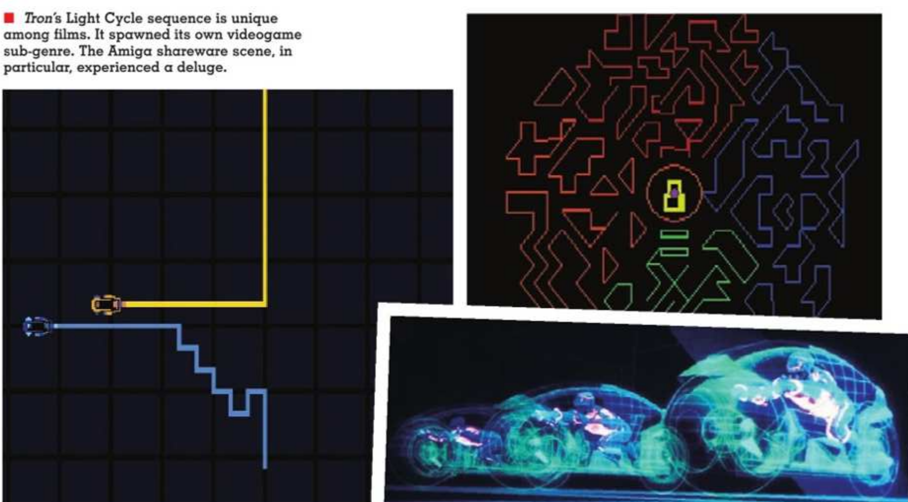
THIS WAS MY first script as a writer, although I was a feature film development executive at Universal Studios, and I began thinking about a story and script for this wonderful visual concept Steven had created. There was no story or other character concept, and I proposed that it be a live-action/animation combination about a guy who would fall inside the computer and, *Wizard Of Oz*-like, have an adventure in there and have to get back out.

The character of Flynn was originally a guy delivering a pizza very late one night to an artificial intelligence lab. He simply can't keep his hands off all the interesting looking equipment and gets zapped inside. My original script was what Disney bought after I had written more than ten treatments and four or five complete drafts. I based the original character of Alan/Tron on Alan Kay (now my husband) who was, along with his group at Xerox Parc, responsible for inventing most of what we take as the face of personal computing today. We met when I hired him as technical consultant on *Tron*.

We did a lot of work to ensure the computer stuff in the film was all based on some kind of reality. Most of this was subsequently cut and Alan took his name off the picture. There was a lot more subtle technical background and science in the original drafts I did. I spent a lot of time learning about this stuff from Alan and laying in cool things that, had they been kept, would have been a source of delight to techies for years to come. I personally love it when science fiction works on more than one level like this and was sad to see it go, although the final visuals were stunning (this is Steven's real gift) and Wendy Carlos's music was simply terrific.

I loved *Pong* and had actually played a really early version of it with blinking lights on a PDP11 at Stanford. I was definitely predisposed toward technology and as far as I know, *Tron* was the first screenplay ever to be written and edited on a computer. After I started working with Alan I typed my script into a device hooked by rubber cups to my telephone, and then went up to Parc and edited the script on the Alto. After *Tron*, I continued to write more scripts but had to wait several years until the first Mac before I had anything close to what was available at Parc.





■ *Tron's* Light Cycle sequence is unique among films. It spawned its own videogame sub-genre. The Amiga shareware scene, in particular, experienced a deluge.

the digital world from our perspective while playing the game. Since the technology of the time only allowed for this eventuality anyway, it's hard to say whether the software engineers at Midway achieved success by design or by good fortune.

By representing the arcade equivalent of the famous Light Cycle sequence as a simple, line-based 'Etch A Sketch to the death' (rather than a literal motorcycle race, as seems obvious), the underlying premise and mysticism of the movie was retained. What if these two electronic lines, racing for our entertainment, were living entities battling for their lives? Actively engaging the limitless scope of a player's imagination is worth more to a game than any amount of technologically superior graphics. Unfortunately, this also holds true for a film.

Despite the family-friendly, sugar-based gloss Disney paints its products with, *Tron* is hardcore sci-fi. Watching it now, it's far easier to pick out the technical references and therefore understand the lives and cultures of those digital entities, but in 1982, jargon such as 'mainframe', 'algorithm', 'binary bits' and 'security protocols' were quite alien to the general populace, and created a significant gulf of misunderstanding between the two worlds. Without a common point of reference, many character and object-based metaphors of the digital realm were lost, replaced by confusion and a disassociation between the computer-generated imagery and live-action scenes. Since it was still beyond the realm of possibility to mix CGI and live-action video, audiences struggled to grasp the scale and relevance of the graphics, no longer sure how the different elements related to each other.

THE MASSIVE PUSH given to the coin-op games, including low-cost cabinets with profit margins cut to the bone to ensure market saturation, meant there was a wealth of *Tron* fanaticism already in place for the film's release. But the ambiguous, if absorbing storyline – which was far better suited to the mind of a gamer than a cinema-goer – had left expectations very much open to interpretation. When *Tron's* limited appearance – replaced instead by the supercilious beach boy of programming, Flynn – was coupled with the sectarian religious undertones, the few people who strayed from the arcade into the auditorium found enjoyment only in brief snippets of Flynn's arcade, and found themselves cheering for Sark rather than the feeble insurance salesmen who made up the protagonist faction.

While loose change poured from the pockets of gamers and into arcade coin boxes, the cinema box-office rang with naught but the echo of an empty theatre. *Tron* had managed to reclaim the massive amounts of development money required to see the experimental filmmaking process through to the end, but it would take two decades and a gradually emerging cult status to appear before audience appreciation finally set in. *Tron* had the potential to unite the videogame and film industries both on and off the screen, and become a celebration as well as a record of the beginnings of a new culture of videogames. However, it never quite made its way onto the high-score table.

ENGAGING A PLAYER'S IMAGINATION IS WORTH MORE TO A GAME THAN SUPERIOR GRAPHICS

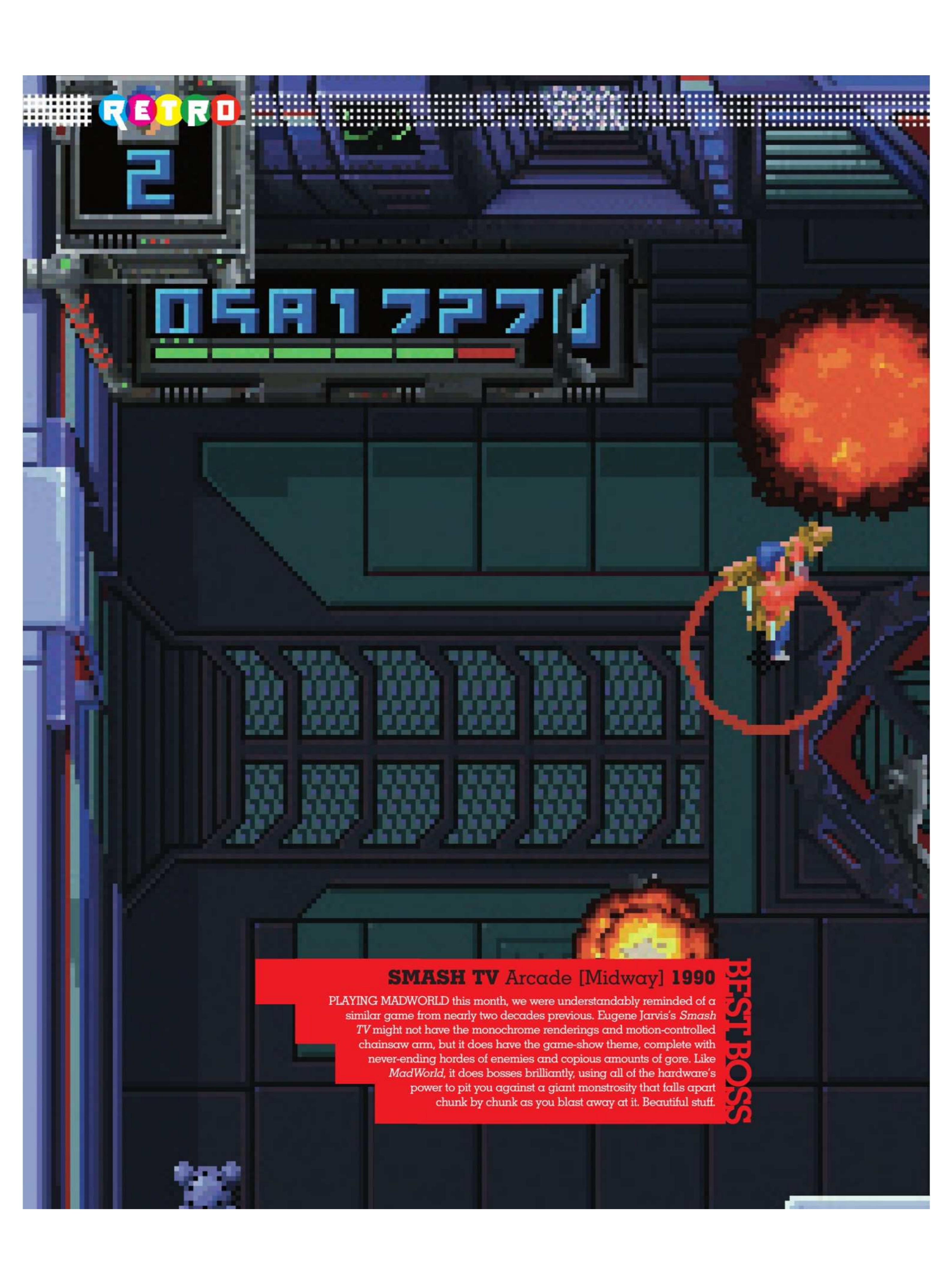
Instead of connecting two apparently dissimilar worlds and their cultures (cinema and games, work and play, positive and negative, digital and analogue), the result suffered from a binary personality. Split in two: one success, one failure. *Tron* broke down a great many barriers and can claim numerous unique achievements, but it will perhaps always be best remembered as the first and perhaps only film to have been enjoyed in the arcades a hell of a lot more than it was in the cinema.



■ As videogame interpretations go, the *Tron* coin-op was a mixed bag of variously accurate mini-games. Who knows what this screenshot depicts?



■ *Tron* is set to appear on Xbox Live Arcade later on in the year. Is this a hint of more to come or is it simply a well-timed cash-in?



BEST BOSS

SMASH TV Arcade [Midway] **1990**

PLAYING MADWORLD this month, we were understandably reminded of a similar game from nearly two decades previous. Eugene Jarvis's *Smash TV* might not have the monochrome renderings and motion-controlled chainsaw arm, but it does have the game-show theme, complete with never-ending hordes of enemies and copious amounts of gore. Like *MadWorld*, it does bosses brilliantly, using all of the hardware's power to pit you against a giant monstrosity that falls apart chunk by chunk as you blast away at it. Beautiful stuff.





BEHIND THE SCENES

LOL: LACK OF LOVE

Conceived by the composer behind Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence and the creator of Chibi-Robo!, Lack Of Love has to be one of the most unusual games on Dreamcast. Lead designer Kenichi Nishi explains how it came to be...





The way in which Harumi's actions can affect even the tiniest creatures is shown brilliantly throughout *LOL*. Here among his footprints you get to see the true scale of the situation.





Released: 2000
Format: Dreamcast
Publisher: ASCII Entertainment
Developer: Lovedelic

KEY STAFF:
Kenichi Nishi
Director
Ryuichi Sakamoto
Composer
Hiroshi Suzuki
Producer
Hikarin
Lead Artist



ALTHOUGH DREAMCAST enjoyed only short-lived success in Europe and the US, as our ten-year timeline shows, development of new games continued in Japan for many years after Sega discontinued the machine. Like Saturn before it, the retreat of Dreamcast into the East made the console the preserve of passionate import gamers. Enthusiasts lapped up the endless supply of hardcore beat-'em-ups and shooters while others sought out more unusual experiences. *LOL: Lack Of Love* is one such game, a quietly released adventure that now commands high auction prices thanks mostly to its relative scarcity and provocative title. But *Lack Of Love* isn't just a collector's item to be bought, re-sealed and bragged about on forums. It also happens to be one of Dreamcast's best-kept secrets, a beautifully crafted adventure game with a pertinent moral message.

Made by Lovedelic – the studio that later became skip Ltd, developer of *Chibi-Robo!* and *Captain Rainbow* – *LOL* was designed in collaboration with Ryuichi Sakamoto, the world-renowned musician behind the famous theme tune to *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*. The aim was to guide an alien lifeform through the evolutionary process from embryonic amoeba to huge four-legged mammal, all the while investigating the appearance of a robot visitor, intent on transforming the planet in preparation for human colonisation. Easier said than done. The genetic code required for each evolutionary stage could only be acquired by helping other creatures in need – their problems identified by observing their behaviour.

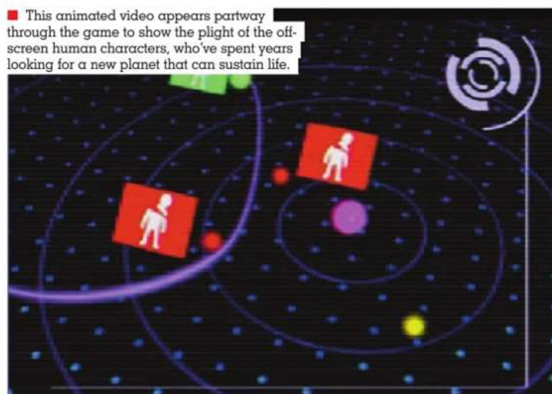
The act of helping others was at the core of *LOL*, just as it is in skip's more CONTINUED >.



LOL: LACK OF LOVE WAS SUPPORTED BY SOME FANS, BUT THE SALES WEREN'T GREAT

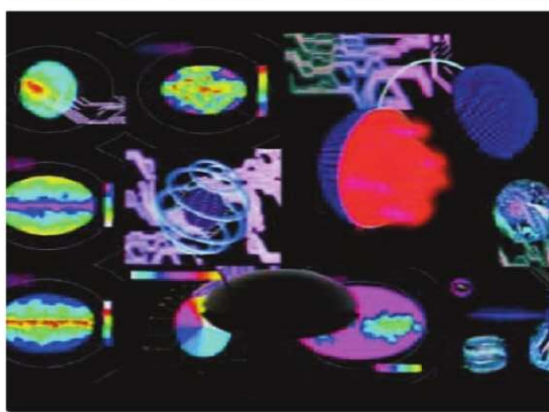






This animated video appears partway through the game to show the plight of the off-screen human characters, who've spent years looking for a new planet that can sustain life.

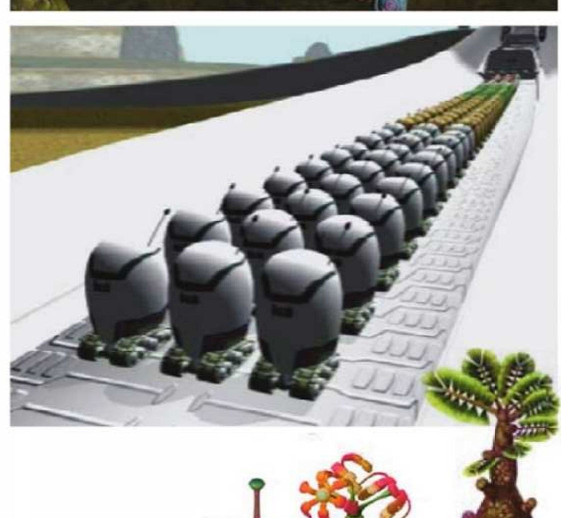






These plants can be bumped at the trunk to make the leaves expand like umbrellas. At one point you'll need to teach another creature to do just that so that it can hide from the rain.







Harumi is the main antagonist of the piece. He's a robot sent out into space to find inhabitable planets since the resources on Earth have been completely exhausted.



Posted by:
ROTEK

Nope, I've never heard of it, either. Actually, that might be a lie. I'm sure I heard the title a short while ago, but I didn't know anything about it until today. Anyway, it looks pretty cool. A bit of a forefather to *Spore* from the looks of it. I can see why it didn't exactly have mass appeal though, especially as it came out on Dreamcast. It's a shame as I genuinely want to play it now. Oh well, the 'Get *Lack Of Love* on XBLA/PSN/Virtual Console' petition starts right here.

Posted by:
ZER0_ONE

Just short of £50 on eBay. Apparently there's no language barrier either so importing it from somewhere cheaper shouldn't be a problem. Consider me tempted.

Posted by:
CRAYMEN EDGE

I'd never heard of it until now, but now I really want to play it.

Posted by:
DEXTERXS

If I had to describe it in one word, it would be 'charming'. The theme of evolution through kindness – a vague adaptation of karmic reincarnation, I guess – along with the quirky characters, abstract but brilliantly detailed environments, delicate musical tones and observation/interaction-based gameplay are so understated that it tugs nicely on the heartstrings. And in terms of evolution and design, it definitely seems a precursor to *Spore*. We might not have played it, but I bet Will Wright has.

Posted by:
SURLY

I thought I knew everything about Dreamcast. But I've never heard of this one.


Mostly free from any on-screen iconography, *LOL's* HUD rarely displays anything other than the meter in the top left, which shows how hungry your creature is.

What They Said...



This is as much an arthouse videogame as you'll ever find, but it brings something new to the arthouse mix: it's fun. It has to be effortlessly one of the best games on the Dreamcast

Consolevania, Episode 2.Late

recent games and is a value close to the heart of lead designer Kenichi Nishi. "We should care for other people, life, the environment and nature," he tells us when asked about *LOL's* message. "Sakamoto came up with the title," he continues, "We wanted to question the way in which our lifestyle lacks love."

But how did a relatively unknown designer and world-famous musician end up creating a Dreamcast game together? "We met through a mutual friend," explains Nishi. "One day when I was working around midnight, my friend called me and said 'Mr Sakamoto is coming to the Club Eden. If you come I could introduce you to him'. Of course, I put my work aside and went to Eden right away." Eager to spend time with someone he admired greatly, Nishi arrived at the club and asked if he could sit with Sakamoto, who agreed instantly and happily chatted with him. "We talked about music, games, movies, novels, and computer technology for almost three hours even though I'd only met him for the first time. In the end I asked him to give me his address because I wanted to send him *Moon*, the PlayStation game I was working on at the time. And he gave me his email address," the designer exclaims.

A friendly exchange of emails ensued until the pair found themselves discussing James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis. This scientific theory suggests Earth's geology and species exist to work in harmony and will respond to global ecological changes in order to maintain the planet's ability to sustain life, and that the planet could, in fact, be considered a living entity in its own right. Sakamoto asked: "Can we make a game from the Gaia Hypothesis?" and suggested he write the music for such a game. The idea for *Lack Of Love* was born.

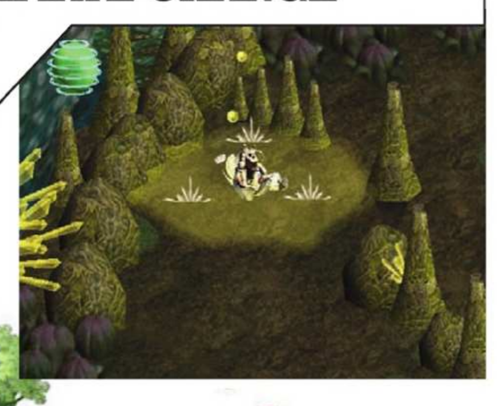
Now to decide which platform to develop the game on. Lovedelic's previous two games were both published on PlayStation, but *Lack Of Love* was destined for a newer console as Nishi reveals. "Mr Hirose, the president of Sega at the time, persuaded me to develop *LOL* for Dreamcast at the penthouse of a hotel in New York, as we looked at the Empire State Building right across from us."

Work began on *Lack Of Love* in 1998, with Sakamoto formally assigned to soundtrack duties toward the end of the project but continually suggesting ideas to Nishi throughout development. Hikarin, Lovedelic's in-house artist, worked on the backgrounds, creating a half-familiar landscape full of alien-looking plant life and creatures. While Nishi took care of the overall direction.

Nishi's main intention was to communicate the game's themes without using text, a feature that was doubly important for those importing the game from outside Japan. This was achieved in two ways: to set the scene, Nishi directed a lengthy opening animation showing the robotic antagonist character searching for an inhabitable planet and then landing on the player's home planet and marching several digging machines across the land in order to transform it. For the actual gameplay sections, Nishi needed to create several puzzles for the player to solve. Much like a point-and-click adventure, this all had to be communicated without dialogue. "It was not easy at all," he says. "Without text or voice, the NPC creatures have to communicate by their movements, expressions or sounds. And Dreamcast's graphic performance was not high enough to make them communicate by their facial expressions so we had to choose a sound-communication system. But the communication with sound alone is much more vague than language."

Despite such difficulties, Lovedelic did a great job of constructing puzzles that force the player to observe their surroundings. One early example sees a group of tiny aliens desperately reaching up

LOL WOULD BE MORE ACCEPTED TODAY AS WE'RE DEALING WITH CLIMATE CHANGE









The Sounds Of Love



AS LACK OF LOVE was co-designed by a composer, you'd expect it to have a great soundtrack. Which it does. Moody and atmospheric, the score combines orchestral and electronic sounds to perfectly capture the journey of the player from tiny sea creature to planet-saving mammal. Increasing in scale and intensity alongside the visuals, Sakamoto's score conveys the emotion of the piece in the absence of any in-game dialogue or text. The main theme, according to Sakamoto's liner notes was written to convey the sadness that comes from feeling a 'lack of love' as well as the tragedy of losing the environment. The rest of the score continues with such considered orchestrations, with Sakamoto taking influence from sources such as "The coldness of artificial life", the effect technology has on the natural landscape, and even the sound of classic sci-fi films like *Dune*. For a composer to be so aware of a game's fundamental themes at the compositional level was extremely rare in 2000, making the *LOL* soundtrack a pioneering work. And, unlike the game, you can still buy the album in shops today.

to feed on a fruit plant they can't reach. Once you realise what they're after, you can charge into the plants to knock the fruit down from the branches and the tiny creatures will reward you with their DNA.

Acquire enough genetic code and you can locate a safe spot to turn into an egg and re-hatch as a new creature, slightly bigger and with new powers. One evolutionary stage fits light-emitting antennae to the player's head while an earlier mutation awards the ability to urinate at the touch of a button. "That was my idea," beams Nishi. "Eating and excreting are a part of energy circulation, and making the creature urinate is essential to that process. Also I thought it was very cute."

As the game progresses, the creature gradually morphs and mutates from a single-celled organism to a huge mammal resembling an anteater. Along the way it takes on many unusual forms as well as a few recognisable ones. A certain form in particular almost looks like a small black-and-white puppy, a lot like Tao the dog who appears in *Moon*, *Chibi-Robo!* and *Captain Rainbow*, and is based on Nishi's real-life pet. "I did that on purpose," he admits, "because I think Tao's black-and-white colour is very simple and universal. I hope someday he will be popular enough to make merchandise of his character."

Save points are so sparsely placed throughout the game that you could often starve to death before reaching one.

Released on 2 November 2000, *LOL: Lack Of Love* emerged into the world to exactly the same response as all of Nishi's other games before: a minority adored it while the mainstream ignored it. "*LOL* was enthusiastically supported by some fans, but the sales were not great," remembers Nishi. "I think it was not one of those mainstream games that everybody likes." *LOL*'s theme and setting certainly separate it from the bankable generic titles that clog up most of the top ten in any given year, which may explain why it was never picked up for a European or US release – a decision that concerns Nishi to this day.

KENICHI NISHI
Director

That's not to say that *Lack Of Love* had no effect on anyone. Those who did manage to play it found themselves moved by the game's conservational message, particularly at the point when the player must consider denying the continued survival of the human race or the protection of its own planet's inhabitants, represented in-game by a choice between a human baby and a friendly creature that follows the player through most of the adventure. Without spoiling the ending, we can't say which of the two survives and which faces extinction, but the conclusion of the game is suitably powerful and one of the most emotional of the time. The message was not lost on the game-playing public. "One of the players emailed me and told me that he stopped killing mosquitoes after playing *LOL*," recalls Nishi. "I was glad to know my game could affect someone's life."

Considering the effect *Lack Of Love* had on its small audience, we wonder how gamers would react to it now given the fact that games like *Shadow Of The Colossus* and *Braid* have legitimised the use of games as social metaphor. Such a re-release, we are told, would be tricky to greenlight since the rights are currently split between ASCII Entertainment and Ryuichi Sakamoto, but Nishi remains enthusiastic about the prospect. "If I have a chance, I would like to remake *LOL* for another console and release it again. I believe *Lack Of Love* would be accepted more widely now because we are more seriously dealing with climate change and global warming. I wish someone would show an interest in releasing it and give me a chance to create a remake." Funnily enough, so do we.

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Quirky PSone role-playing game *Moon* was the first of Nishi's to centre on helping others, and follows a similar structure to *LOL*.



That structure has been refined and evolved over the years and was perfected in Kenichi Nishi's cult GameCube adventure *Chibi-Robo!*.



Hall Of Fame…

Mike Haggar

In this month's Hall of Fame we take a look at the father-in-law you really don't want to upset: Metro City's great white knight Mike Haggar

DESPITE THE QUICK Bushin ninjitsu of Guy, and Cody's pretty-boy looks, any true *Final Fight* fan will always say 'Mike Haggar' when pressed on who they consider the real star of Capcom's revered beat-'em-up series. A videogame wrestler matched in popularity only by the bear-hugging biceps of his street fighting rival Zangief, Haggar has become the most popular wrestler to ever smash onto the videogame circuit, and for good reason.

When a thick layer of crime suffocates Metro City, the newly elected mayor, Mike Haggar, decides the time has come to clean up the streets. The Mad Gear Gang, led by a wealthy millionaire, rule the city, and after Haggar turns down a cash bribe in return for turning a blind eye to their criminal activities, the Mad Gears decide to kidnap his daughter Jessica to force him under their control.

Haggar, who doesn't take kindly to being threatened, surprises his constituents by yanking off his tie, tearing off his shirt and donning a pair of green slacks and a single-support brace. Pulling together a crack team of muscle, made up of his old gym pal and Jessica's ex-boyfriend Cody, along with Cody's pal Guy, they venture out onto the means streets of Metro City to rescue her. It's not what you'd call a typical method of making the streets safer, but Mike Haggar is not your typical mayor.

FINAL FIGHT'S PLOT smacks of the popcorn action films of the Eighties. And while the 'rescue the pretty kidnapped girl' plot has been done a hundred times before in film and equally in videogames – *Kung Fu Master*, *Double Dragon* and *Super Mario Bros* – many studious fans have traced *Final Fight's* plot and the decadent look of Metro City to the 1984 Walter Hill film *Streets Of Fire*. A weird mix of cheesy action meets rock opera set in a bizarre futuristic Fifties-style world, *Streets Of Fire's* plot centres on the kidnapping of a pretty club singer, played by Diana Lane, at the hands of a ruthless gang called The Bombers, and the rescue mission initiated by the singer's ex-boyfriend – an ex-mercenary named Tom Cody – and his two friends. Weirdly, one of these is played by actor Rick Moranis and, before you think it, no, he doesn't play a Mike Haggar-type character, because there isn't one.

However, the look and characteristics of Capcom's fictional mayor still point to the big screen. You see, Haggar's life shares a weird parallel with the ex-wrestler/actor, Jesse 'The Governing Body' Ventura, who, post-retirement, went on to become the Governor of Minnesota in 1999. Jesse, who played the role of the cocky soldier Blain 'I ain't got time to bleed' Cooper in *Predator*, sported a Haggar-esque moustache and about a hundred thousand muscles, and shares an uncanny resemblance to Metro City's mayor. In fact, had a *Final Fight* movie been greenlit around the early-Nineties, we're pretty sure Jesse would have been a shoo-in for the role of Haggar, and Minnesota would have had to find itself a new governor.

So why has Haggar become such an enduring character among beat-'em-up fans? Well, we'd put it down to Capcom's obvious empathy for the character. Haggar is the only member of the original *Final Fight* trio to have appeared in every subsequent game. Reappearing in *Final Fight Guy* and even getting a brief cameo in the god-awful PS2 3D fighter *Final Fight Streetwise*, saw Haggar all but forgotten by the people of Metro City and working as a gym owner. Moreover, Haggar is the only character in the *Final Fight* series – and maybe even in Capcom history – to have his own videogame spin-off, appearing as a character in the brilliant *Saturday Night Slam Masters* wrestling series.

But what really sets Haggar apart from his peers is the wonderfully layered and deep back story Capcom gave the character. Haggar is portrayed as a protective father, an honest and hardworking mayor and an ex-pro wrestler, three characteristics that help give him a sense of humanity and make him instantly memorable. While Cody and Guy went on to become popular characters with fans of the series, there's no denying they are typical of the kind of characters usually found punching and kicking their way through screens of goons called P Radar and Tre Mendous. And even with *Final Fight's* wonderful visuals and slick co-op mode, without its mayor supporting the campaign, the game would have become just another girlfriend rescue mission. Remove Haggar from *Final Fight* and it would be sorely missing something integral to its charm.

>. MAGIC MOMENTS



Haggar takes down your name at the start of *Dungeons & Dragons: Tower Of Doom.*



In Chun-Li's stage in *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* the wall breaks to reveal a familiar face.



Making his subtle entrance to the ring in the wrestling game *Saturday Night Slam Masters.*



Haggar makes a cameo in *Final Fight Streetwise*, helping you dust up some thugs.

HAIR

Traditionally, Haggar has always asked for a short back and sides when going to his local barber, although in *Final Fight 3* his hairstyle got a dramatic makeover. Maybe in a misguided bid to make the character look a bit younger, Capcom gave Haggar a ponytail. Suffice it to say, it wasn't really a popular look and the head-tail was quickly cut off, never to appear again.

MOUSTACHE

The moustache gives Haggar a sense of authority, age and worldliness – all qualities that Capcom needed to instil in the character. Like Sir Arthur's beard and Mario's moustache, Mike's facial hair has remained for the entirety of the *Final Fight* series, and has become a signature look for the character.

BRACE

Like his moustache, the olive-green belt Haggar wears across his chest has become another iconic look for the character. While the belt may seem like a variation of the trouser braces Haggar is seen wearing in his office during *Final Fight's* intro, it's more likely the brace dates back to when he was a pro wrestler, as it also forms part of his wrestling attire in the *Saturday Night Slam Masters* series.

ARMS

The strongest of the three main characters in *Final Fight*, Haggar's impressive strength comes from his time working as a pro wrestler and indulging in the odd street fight. As a result, many of his moves – the suplex, spinning clothesline and pile-driver – have carried over from the many hours he spent sitting on men's faces for a living.

TROUSERS

Haggar's attire has only really been tweaked during the course of *Final Fight's* Super Nintendo timeline. He is usually dressed in a pair of green slacks and a support brace, but in *Final Fight 2*, Capcom added a pair of orange shin guards to his costume, and in *Final Fight 3* the mayor even donned a fetching pair of sprayed-on wrestling shorts.



■ Capcom released a Haggar costume for Zangief, which plays on the pair's friendly rivalry.



■ Mike takes the call from the Mad Gear Gang and discovers they've kidnapped his daughter.



■ *Mighty Final Fight* made Haggar and co 'super deformed' and added soft RPG elements.



■ Mike is reunited with his daughter after beating Mad Gear. The pair share an emotional embrace.

Metro City: A Tourist's Guide

Welcome to Metro City, home of the infamous wrestler-turned mayor Mike Haggar. When venturing outside it's advisable to have a stab vest, crash helmet and, if you own one, a tank. If you're looking for things to make your stay more memorable, why not surf on the city's famous crime waves, bask in the glorious blood-soaked streets, or take a bottle to any of the city's scruffy looking denizens? We hope you enjoy your time here in Metro City and trust you live long enough to visit again

The Slums:



If you're looking for a great place to start your trip in Metro City, why not visit the world famous slums? As far as desolate hobbles of brick and mortar go, it doesn't get much better than this. There's plenty to discover: punch a couple of oil drums to death and see what apples or cooked meat you find.

The Subway:



Metro City's subway system is the quickest and safest way to get around, and if you don't know where to go, don't panic, because help is at hand. You can ring any one of the helpful Metro City tour guides, such as Poison, whose phone number can be found scrawled in telephone boxes and toilets throughout town.

For a great night out, visit our brand new leisure complex and watch a no-holds-barred wrestling match... or even participate in one. Here's a shot of the mayor keeping up Metro City's international relations by wrestling the agriculture minister of some fictional city somewhere in Japan.



Wrestling:

Car Wash:



The mayor organised a sponsored car wash to raise money for a local school. It's just a shame he forgot to bring any water. Still, it's amazing what you can do with a spot of elbow grease and bit of lead pipe.



West Side:

If you fancy grabbing a bite to eat, you could do a lot worse than paying a visit to Metro City's delicious West Side district, home to plenty of fine eateries and cocktail bars. The NinNin bar is a firm favourite with locals and tourists, so stop by and order a giant cocktail and then consume it using the bar's famous oversized steel straws.

Up Town:



When the sun is shining there's no better place to relax in Metro City than in our new Up Town development. Here's the mayor making a fleeting visit to the city's retirement village. The mayor and Jessica have come to visit their old pal Belger, who was forced into a wheelchair after the mayor jokingly threw him out of a window for kidnapping his daughter. It's okay, though, they all see the funny side now.

UP TOWN

INDUSTRIAL AREA

BAY AREA

If the skies are grey and the sun's being miserable, don't fret. We've got it covered. To make sure you always leave Metro City with a beaming holiday tan, take a quick trip to Industrial City Gym – home to some of the most powerful tanning beds in the world.



Industrial Area:

Bay Area:



The public toilets are a great place to find approachable and outgoing people. This local biker is telling the mayor how nice he looks with his shirt missing. The mayor responds by explaining to the nice man how big the key to the city actually is.

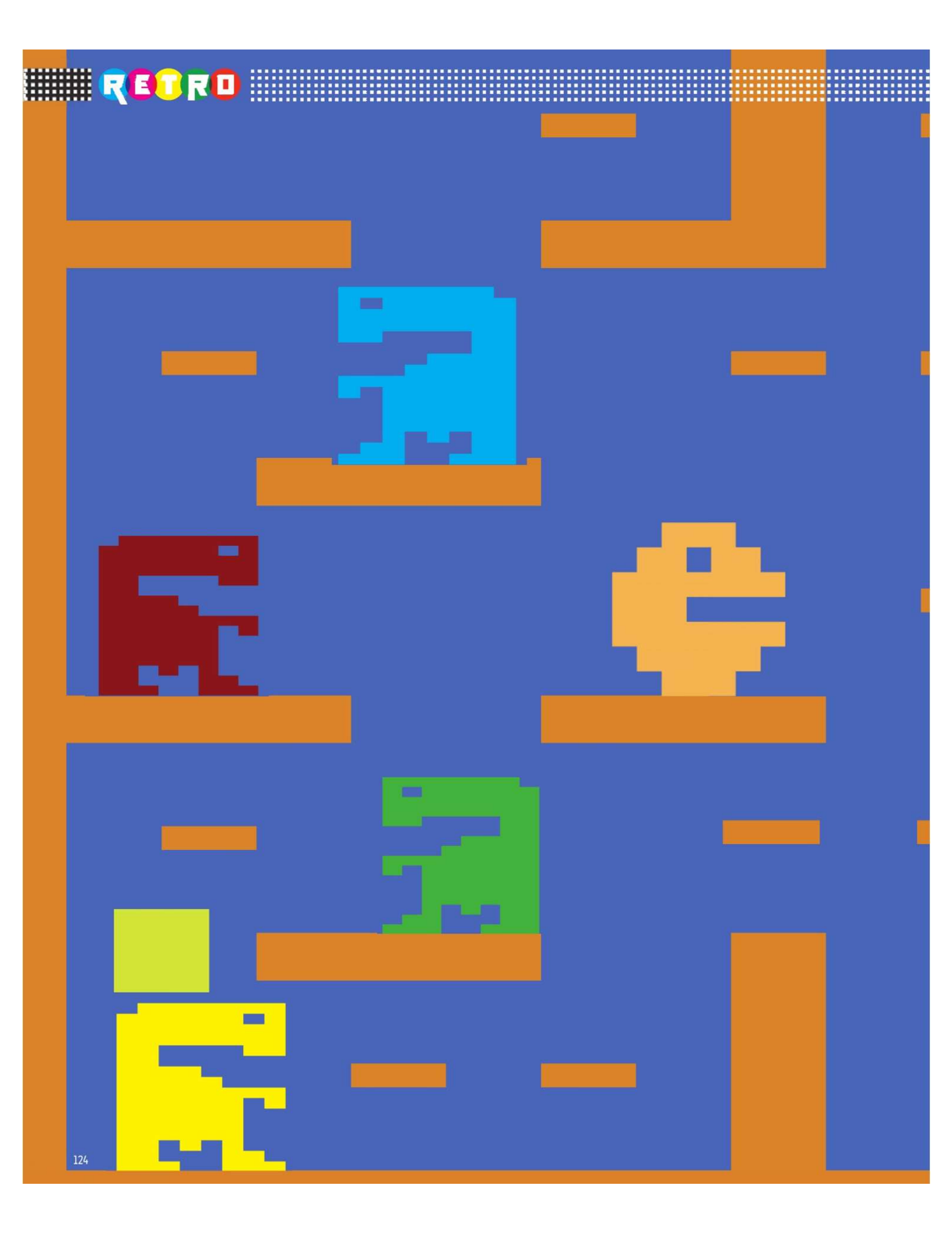
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Contra III: The Alien Wars Konami [SNES] **1992**

TO THOSE WHO never bothered with the Nineties import scene, this is better known as *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels*, a game that was mostly identical except for the fact that the main characters were robots. As children, we loved it for the simple reason that robots are cool, but our tastes have gradually shifted over the years. We're much more partial to *Contra III* with its human protagonists these days. Why? Because gunning down giant skeletal terrapins, as a bulked up Arnie clone, is just that little bit cooler. It feels like there's more risk involved and is therefore much more exciting. That, and *Probotector's* robots don't sport glorious Eighties mullets and bandanas, so they're obviously nowhere near as cool in retrospect.





CRASH AND BURN

Prior to 1983, silicon and code were more valuable than silver and gold, until it all came tumbling down. 25 years on, we look back at the videogame market crash to see if lessons have been learned

VIDEOGAMES IN THE Seventies consisted primarily of *Pong*-style titles, with every possible variation played out, homogenised, and laboured to the point of mortal exhaustion. By 1977, the superfluity of bat-and-ball games suggested to the apathetic consumer that the medium was a one-trick pony, ready to be put out to pasture. While the bargain bins heaved with unsold *Pong* consoles, gamers looked elsewhere for their time-wasting entertainment.

While the shoppers might have begun to saunter away, a huge number of manufacturers were blindly running for the exits – their faith in the industry that made them rich, quickly and profoundly shaken. But not all were so squeamish, and it was this determination to progress the medium by a few stalwart campaigners that marks the difference between the respective financial disasters of 1977 and 1983.

While *Pong* dissolved into obscurity overnight, Atari used the carcases of first-generation consoles as a springboard to launch the VCS. Though certainly not the first to make use of microprocessor-based hardware and ROM cartridges, it was undeniably well supported and marketed. VCS games were a licence to print money, and burst through the dam of dead *Pong* consoles with an unstoppable fury.

As we're still seeing today, success and failure have very little to do with technological prowess – they hinge on good marketing, shrewd management, and the quality of gameplay. By 1982, the VCS was failing on two of these three fronts; coasting on the heady fumes of a massive install base and a once-dominating reputation, but quality control of the games had become a minor consideration. To garner an inside perspective on that teetering industry, we spoke with a man who was there at the time and knew as much about games as anyone alive: the inventor of videogames, Ralph Baer.



JACK TRAMIEL
Commodore Founder

"As everybody knows, a glut of cartridges were released with the same gameplay over and over, so much so that tons of VCS carts wound up in landfills," Baer recalls about the industry he founded with the original Magnavox Odyssey. For the sake of a willing scapegoat, the movie tie-in for *ET* and the home conversion of *Pac-Man* on VCS are the two games regularly hung with the rope woven from the 1983 market crash. But could these games really bring a billion-dollar industry to its knees?

> **THE NES WASN'T BORN BECAUSE OF THE MARKET CRASH BUT IN SPITE OF IT** RALPH BAER

These games were the product of a corporate mind that believed its own gospel a little too profoundly. Atari, now under the ruthless dominion of Warner Communications, showered fathomless amounts of resources on the game's productions bar one: time. Promising $25 million in royalties to Spielberg for *ET*, and readily agreeing a weighted contract to programmer Tod Frye for the *Pac-Man* conversion wasn't the issue for Atari. The only stipulation was that both games must hit the shelves within a matter of weeks, rather than the months that it actually took to construct a brand new title.

THE RESULTING QUALITY of the two biggest Atari titles of all time was a direct reflection of their harshly curtailed development cycle, and couldn't have ruined Christmas 1982 more for young gamers if they came with a free packet of reindeer poison. The loyalty of America's gamers was tested to its elastic limit. When the two highly anticipated games CONTINUED >.

finally arrived in 1983 they were so bad that people simply stopped buying videogames. There was no bartering, no negotiation – there was nothing any company could do to remain buoyant in the wake of their own avarice and disregard for the player. The industry drowned with the blood of a thousand dreadful games in its lungs.

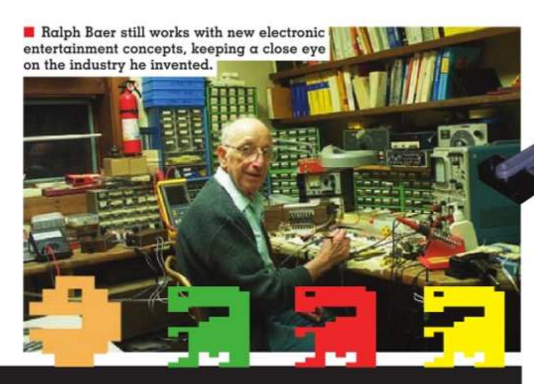
"The boneheads at Warner should have gotten a better game system to market than the tired old VCS," says Baer. "The engineers tried but management balked. Besides, they chased most of the good game designers out of the company to Activision, at first, followed by the other third-party developers."

As Baer suggests, it wasn't simply a case of the dot eater failing in the console market, or *ET* wishing he hadn't gone home after all; it was the over-milking of a withered cash cow that was crushing the gamer's soul. And not just within Atari. The competition made little effort to entice the players over to their side with well-made games – instead relying on price wars and lawsuits to snare customers.

Warner attempted to stop third-party developers from creating games for Atari's machine while court cases flew back and forth as the desperation to retain profits became increasingly difficult. A huge amount of effort was spent on maintaining a stranglehold on the industry, all at the expense of creating decent-quality videogames. As the industry descended into a sordid, schizophrenic mess, the gamers prepared for an unspoken exodus. Forensically speaking, it was indeed an industry market crash, but it was also a terminal separation between symbiotic entities – a bitter divorce between the avaricious developer and the apathetic gamer.

Desperate, game publishers pushed their wares forward more aggressively than ever. In 1982, two years' worth of games were rushed to the shelves to the point where shops had neither the physical room nor the inclination to carry any more units. In an effort to reduce stock, full-price titles were cut to nearly a seventh of their recommended retail price. While this might have proved appealing to the consumer initially, it did nothing to promote confidence or awareness in the glut of new games, and the player's indifference only deepened.

Two of the major players, Magnavox and Coleco, withdrew from the videogame industry, while others suffered for their perseverance. The technologically sound Vectrex never got the chance to thrive. Third-party developers were working simply for fun, and quickly began to fall by the wayside. Imagic withdrew its public offer the day before the company was due to sell shares after spending $10 million on an advertising campaign, while US Games (owned by Quaker Oats, of all companies) and Games By Apollo were closed down overnight.



Ralph Baer still works with new electronic entertainment concepts, keeping a close eye on the industry he invented.

I DIDN'T SEE ANY LIGHT IN THE TUNNEL UNTIL I MET THE NINTENDO MARKETING MANAGER

STEVE WOZNIAK
Apple Founder

THE BRUTALITY OF the impending collapse echoed through Wall Street, and investors wasted no time in redirecting their speculations. In just a single week at the end of 1982, the plummet in share prices saw an astonishing $1.3 billion disappear from Atari's estimated market value. The industry's number two, Mattel, also experienced a drop of $192 million, while Coleco readied itself to make a big push with *Donkey Kong*, and Arnold Greenberg announced he expected a jump of 180% in 1982's profits. He was to be disappointed.

Despite being over ten years old, the videogame industry was still dogged by suggestions of being nothing more than a fad, and the sudden and violent shakeout only served to reinforce this notion. Newspapers delighted in 'Game Over For Videogames' headlines, and shelf space was casually reallocated. Even Ralph Baer had redirected his talents toward alternate entertainment themes, as he explains:

"To tell you the truth I was pretty much decoupled from the videogame business in the late-Seventies and early-Eighties. That's when I started to concentrate on handheld microprocessor-controlled videogames like Simon. I didn't think much about it at the time because I was focusing on other things; the thoughts I had also reflected what was in the industry press – and that was all negative," he recalls.

America was the cornerstone of the global industry, but it didn't hold complete CONTINUED >.



The ColecoVision, despite selling over a million units, lasted less than two years after being born on the brink of the market crash.

Peripheral Vision



NINTENDO HAD ALREADY tried to break through the cultural East/West barrier at great expense, and finally managed it – as Nintendo of America teetered on the edge of bankruptcy – with the *Donkey Kong* coin-op.

After the success of Famicom in its native territory, Nintendo decided to introduce the system to America. Its first launch attempt began as a partnership with the failing Atari, and when that ended Nintendo attempted to push the machine itself. But the US amusement industry would still have nothing to do with videogames, so a second, more concerted effort was made.

The console was redesigned in a grey box – commonly known as The Toaster – and given a back seat to two fairly average peripherals: a lightgun called the Zapper and a partially interactive robot called ROB. By selling the system as a toy rather than a game, Nintendo managed to secure a small amount of shelf space for the 1985 Christmas season.

Good sales encouraged shops to continue stocking the system, and by the time Mario arrived Nintendo had recaptured the gaming public's imagination, single-handedly resurrecting the US videogame market.



A Q&A WITH HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW



He wrote ET for the Atari 2600, considered the worst game of all time. He also wrote Yar's Revenge, considered one of the best games of all time



GTM: What was Atari's internal reaction to *Pac-Man* and *ET*?
HSW: From inside Atari we felt that these were pretty good efforts considering the restraints we were working under. I mean, *Pac-Man* was originally being done in just 2K. It took a long time to develop, while *ET* was done in just five weeks. For a five-week effort it seemed like a pretty substantial game, and Spielberg had reviewed it and approved it, so everybody seemed okay with that.

ET still sold over a million, but it's one thing to sell that many copies of a game you expected to sell nearer 10,000, but it's another thing selling a million of a game you expected to sell 6 or 7 million. Atari spent so much money buying the licence that if everyone who owned an Atari 2600 had bought a copy, they would still have lost money.

With *Pac-Man* everyone thought, well… it does look a little funky. It clearly wasn't *Pac-Man*, and when you look at what GCC did later with *Ms Pac-Man* you could see what the real potential of the game was. Of course, they had the additional benefit of several years' practice and a great deal more memory.

If you look at these two games in particular, you really see what happened in the shift from engineering to marketing. The engineering approach was to make a game and keep working on it until people were satisfied playing it. Then, as marketing really came on and got the idea of licensing, converting, and that sort of thing, what was important was getting the game out, because they thought the title would sell it, and content seemed less important to them. And it's that theory that's probably at the root of what really killed the industry.

GTM: So, how do you feel Atari contributed to the market crash? Was it a succession of two particularly bad titles, or an attitude of marketing over quality?
HSW: It was a crisis in expectations. That's what the crash really was. People were still waiting for the new experience, and that's what we were trying to deliver. These days, people know what to expect and what not to expect from a game, but back then everything was new and the public were still vulnerable to that kind of marketing build-up. Atari promised them the moon and did not deliver.

IT WAS A CRISIS IN EXPECTATIONS. THAT'S WHAT THE CRASH REALLY WAS

And then you follow that up with *ET*, a beloved movie brimming with emotion, and promise to deliver that same emotion in the game. It's crazy. You could say that it was absurd for people to think they're going to get that out of a game, but it's not absurd for people to believe what you promise them. But when you promise that kind of emotional experience and deliver a game that was made in five weeks, that's a very different violation of contract.

GTM: When did Atari start to notice the decline in sales and public interest in videogames?
HSW: You have to understand that we were self-deluded in a lot of ways. We thought it odd that Atari was trying to source development from all these other places, and was actually fuelling that problem of market saturation, and when things started to turn around I guess we heard it but didn't want to understand it.

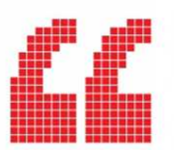
At the end of 1982, with all the amazing things they'd released and the solid profit they'd done, and the hype with games in general still being as strong as it was, no one really noticed that something wasn't working. Nobody wanted to even think it. I don't think I accepted anything was wrong until late-1983, and it would be early-1984 before I started to consider that maybe this gravy train was jumping off the rails.

I mean, I never thought that it was a fad that would blow over like they were saying in the media. When I saw stuff like that I thought 'You gotta be kidding!' That stuff was written by people who didn't play games. I think anyone who'd ever played games understood instantly that this was something that would never go away.

GTM: How did the market crash affect you professionally and personally?
HSW: Late-1984 I left Atari once I realised the show was over. It didn't occur to me to pursue games, although it might have been a good idea for me. I went in all sorts of other directions – I got a real-estate broker's licence for a while, I did some writing, and some teaching, then got back into computers. I worked in and out of various systems for all kinds of government agencies, but it wasn't very gratifying because there was no creative component to it, and I decided that I needed to get back into videogames, which is when I went to 3DO. But when I got back into games, it was a whole different industry.



■ *ET* certainly had to shoulder a portion of the blame, but the industry was heading for a crash long before he came home.



Q&A WITH TOM SLOPER DESIGNER OF SPIKE AND BEDLAM ON THE VECTREX



Certain games (like ET and Pac-Man on 2600) have been blamed for the 1983 market crash, but as someone who saw the industry grow from the start, what elements do you think led to the market collapse?
It's common knowledge that the problem was that the platform holders didn't have control over what games could be made on their platforms, or when they did have control they didn't exert it. Once the 2600 was reverse engineered and games like *Custer's Revenge* could be made and released, the writing was on the wall. And publishers unwisely made bad games and/or too many copies of their games. And the retail channel unwisely put bad games and/or too many games on the shelves. I may be wrong though – maybe it isn't common knowledge.

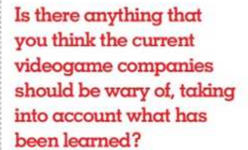


Do you think Western Technologies would have developed a Vectrex 2, or Vectrex Colour, had the market not collapsed? Were there any plans for a follow-up system?
The prototype of the colour Vectrex is shown every year at the Classic Gaming Expo, so yes there were plans.

How did the market collapse affect you personally and professionally?
I fell back on my previous vocation before being a game designer: model maker. I built models of toys, and designed non-electronic board games, until Atari's Mike Katz hired me to work in videogames again in 1986, but not as a designer. It wasn't until 1993 that, as a producer, I was able to design some new versions of Shanghai. Activision had no idea I was a designer until I went ahead and designed stuff they wanted me to produce.

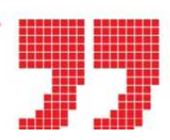
At the time, did you think the market collapse signified the end of videogames, or did you know that the market would recover?
I knew videogames weren't dead. The genie had been let out of the bottle, you see. People had learned that it was possible to interact with their TVs. There's no way the future would not include interactive television after that.

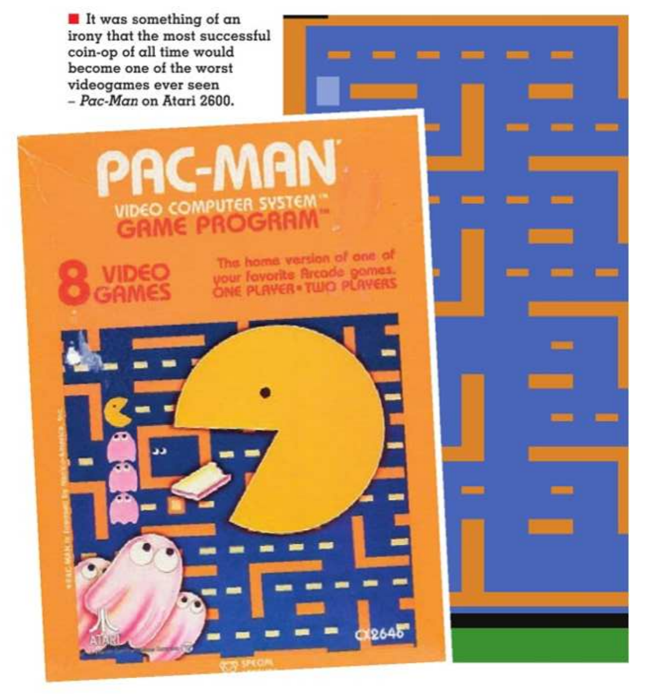
Do you think the effects of the crash changed the industry and its approach to game development once the market began to recover?
The industry was definitely changed. But no, I refuse to say the approach to videogame development changed. It didn't. It was the platform holders and the retail channels that changed the most.



Despite its unique design and excellent games, Vectrex suffered an early and undignified death immediately after the crash.

Is there anything that you think the current videogame companies should be wary of, taking into account what has been learned?
Lessons were definitely learned. Nintendo's early Famicoms – the mid-Eighties ones with floppy disk drives – wouldn't work unless the floppy disk had the word 'Nintendo' stamped deeply into the disks' plastic housings. It would have been trademark infringement to make such floppies without a licence. Then later their machines wouldn't work unless words to the effect of 'under licence from Nintendo' were embedded into the code, and it would have been trademark infringement to put that into the code without a licence. All the platform holders since then have exerted control over not only which games may be made for their platforms, but also how many games could be made. And the retail channel learned not to permit a glut of videogames, especially bad ones, in their stores. Publishers have to be selective about what games they make, and they have to fight to get shelf space once they're made. So whatever lessons the industry needs to learn from the crash were learned long ago, and we still see its effects today.



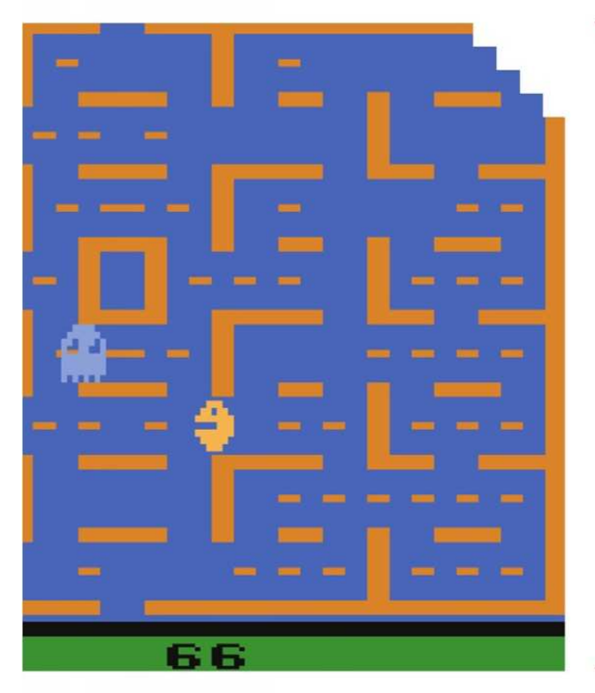


It was something of an irony that the most successful coin-op of all time would become one of the worst videogames ever seen – *Pac-Man* on Atari 2600.

dominion. The Japanese consumer had always preferred local products, while Europe had other entertainment avenues to explore. All the while, a more sedate, civilised price war had been raging over home computing, and consumers weren't as disenchanted with electronic entertainment as they might have appeared. The 'kid's toy' visage that videogames had did nothing to promote their appeal with parents. Home computers, however, promised a potential for education that scored serious brownie points with parents.

The disappearance of consoles and cartridges was a huge opportunity for the likes of Commodore, Sinclair, Apple, and Amstrad. The spiralling quality of videogames indirectly encouraged computer users to start making their own entertainment, as Baer remembers: "Serious game players were certainly among the early adopters of Apples, Commodores, and so forth because it gave them the chance to design their own games. But I think if there had never been such a thing as a videogame when these computers came along in the mid-Eighties, then a game industry would have developed based on them anyhow. On the other hand, Steve [Wozniak] said that he 'owed' me for inventing videogames, because that was the inspiration for him to design and build a personal computer that could play games," he recalls with a laugh.

The void left by the market collapse opened the door for home computer manufacturers to build the kind of global install base that would attract game developers to switch sides. Activision is the perfect example of such a survivor, as it skilfully weathered the market collapse by developing for home computers instead. But that wasn't the only shockwave felt by the financial implosion. The widespread American retreat from the industry went



THE SURVIVORS

NO ONE CAME out of the 1983 crash a winner, but some consoles and companies weathered the storm. Chief among them is the Mattel Intellivision, which enjoyed over a decade of game support before being decommissioned in 1991. By 1982, when the market hit its peak, Intellivision had sold over 2 million units. The inevitable trough brought sales to a standstill, but the quality of games saw most players through till development began again.

Activision switched to developing for home computers, pouring a huge portion of its profits from game sales into the alternate, fledgling industry.

Atari was sold and resold, but the name endured, as did the main culprit of the crash: the VCS – now known as 2600. Rebranding brought the system in line with the follow-up 5200 and 7800, though neither achieved the sales the original enjoyed.



The Mattel Intellivision survived the crash in style, and saw continued support until 1991 – an impressive lifespan of 12 years.



almost unfelt in Japan, where the cultural barrier had prevented all but a couple of international success stories. The digital economy shifted overseas, and the continued development of videogames meant that the Rising Sun gained an advantage that's still evident today.

"I DIDN'T SEE any light in the tunnel until I met the marketing manager for Nintendo in Chicago at a CES show," says Baer, recalling the moment when Japan first attempted to resurrect the global videogame industry. "I saw the early NES and talked to him. That immediately told me that they had something going for them. The NES machine wasn't born *because* of the market crash, but *despite it*. Folks at Nintendo had vision and guts. They came up with a superior game machine and outstanding games. That changed the atmosphere overnight."

The Nintendo Famicom had known phenomenal success in Japan, but the US amusement industry refused, point-blank, to entertain the notion of more videogames. It was only thanks to a cleverly camouflaged marketing ploy that the NES managed to spark American interest.

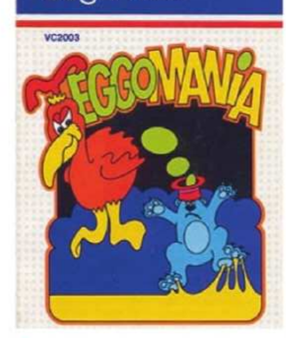
By positioning the console behind two rather superfluous peripherals, ROB The Robot and the Zapper, Nintendo managed to promote the system as a toy, rather than a console. It went a step further for the 1985 Christmas period by offering a sale-or-return policy to the stores, essentially shouldering all the risks involved in attempting to reintroduce videogames to the American consumer.

And while Nintendo broke into America, Sega poured its attention on the neglected European markets, reminding computer users that consoles could be fun, too. By the time the global videogame industry began returning to breathless life thanks almost entirely to these two pioneering companies, Japan was the new digital power.

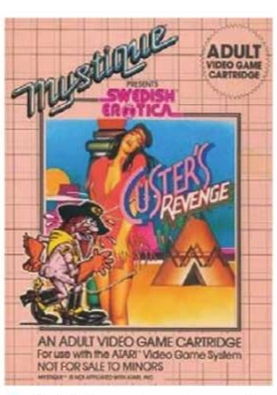
The mid-to-late-Eighties saw a cautious re-emergence of videogame development. This time, every penny and every byte was scrutinised for efficiency and value, but the market crash was gradually proved a harsh pupation into a third age.

Clearly, lessons have been learned, but were these lessons in survival rather than reticence? For the moment at least, the market appears stable – sufficiently grounded by the sheer weight of gold resting in its foundations. But history shows us how quickly the tide can turn, and how much power resides in the affection of the world's gamers toward each and every product. Ralph Baer still understands the trends guiding the market, and imparts his hard-earned wisdom to an industry that's rapidly forgetting its tumultuous history. "Videogames are an established part of how people spend their spare time," he notes, "and they're no more likely to disappear than the movies – even if there are a lot of lousy products in both areas. But the industry needs to keep coming up with new genres so that people of different inclinations, ages, genders, and physical capabilities will become and remain players."

GAMES ARE NOW AN ESTABLISHED PART OF HOW PEOPLE SPEND THEIR SPARE TIME



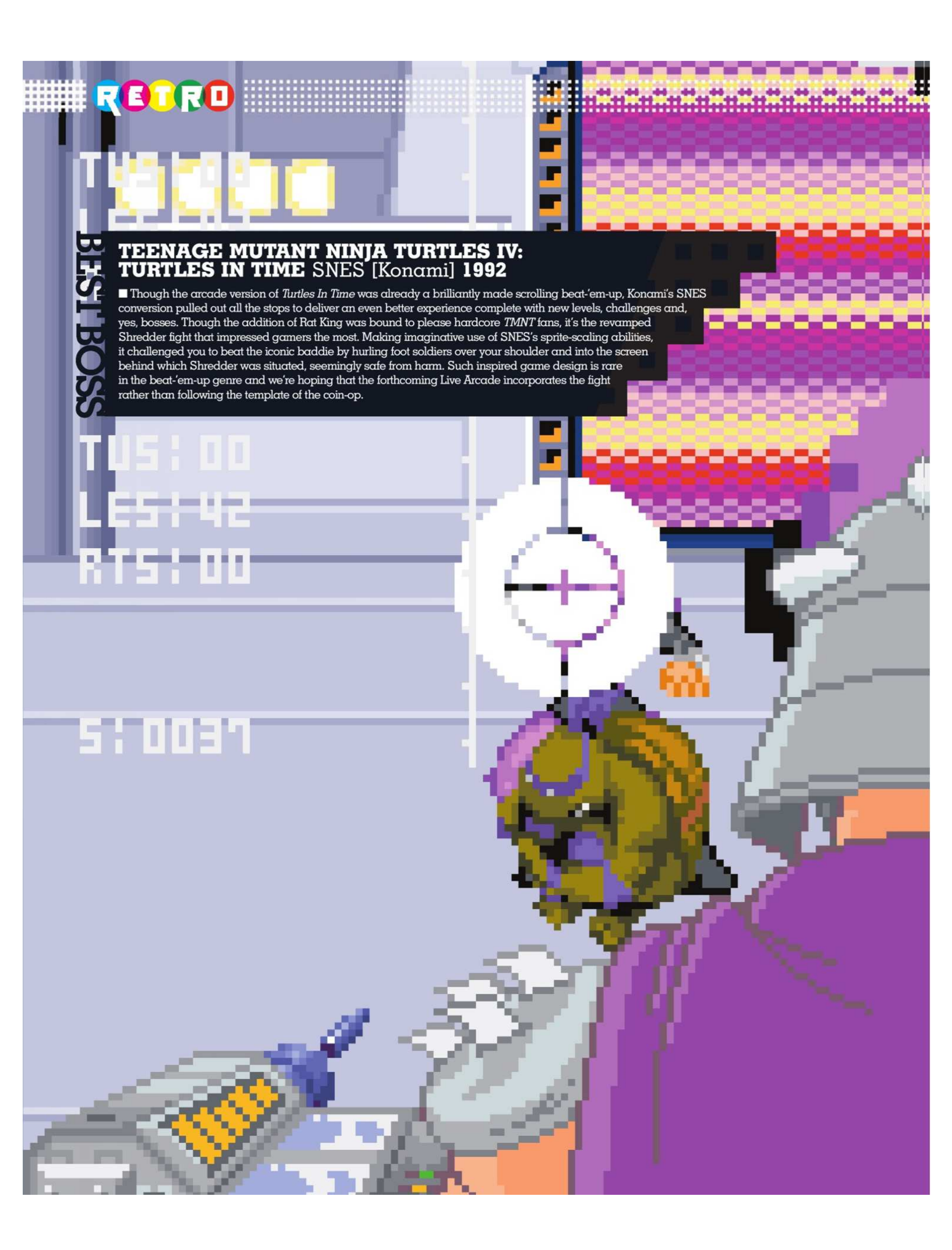
Even Quaker Oats jumped on the videogame bandwagon to make games for the Atari VCS, but bailed out the moment the crash began.



Custer's Revenge is a prime example of the trite games that companies thought they could push onto the dim-witted consumer. They were wrong.



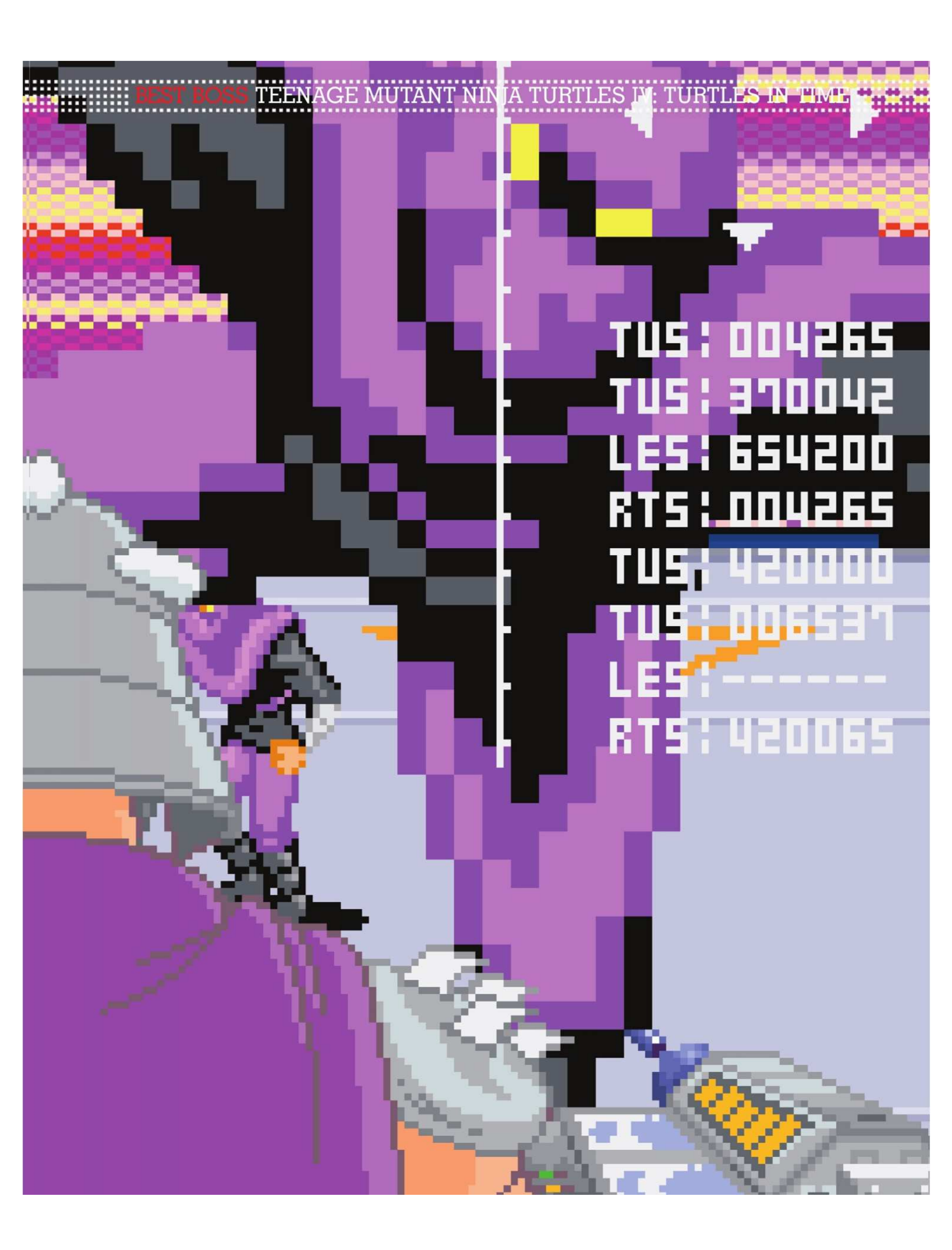


BEST BOSS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME SNES [Konami] 1992

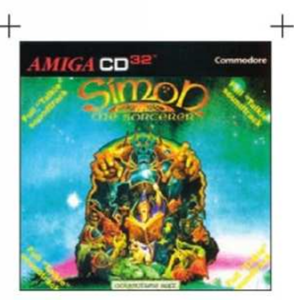
■ Though the arcade version of *Turtles In Time* was already a brilliantly made scrolling beat-'em-up, Konami's SNES conversion pulled out all the stops to deliver an even better experience complete with new levels, challenges and, yes, bosses. Though the addition of Rat King was bound to please hardcore *TMNT* fans, it's the revamped Shredder fight that impressed gamers the most. Making imaginative use of SNES's sprite-scaling abilities, it challenged you to beat the iconic baddie by hurling foot soldiers over your shoulder and into the screen behind which Shredder was situated, seemingly safe from harm. Such inspired game design is rare in the beat-'em-up genre and we're hoping that the forthcoming Live Arcade incorporates the fight rather than following the template of the coin-op.


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BEHIND THE SCENES

SIMON THE SORCERER

How a young man named Simon created a wizard by the same name and went on to challenge the appeal of a mighty pirate named Guybrush



Released: 1993
Format: PC, Amiga, CD32
Publisher: AdventureSoft
Developer: In-House

KEY STAFF:
Simon Woodroffe (Writer, Designer)
Mike Woodroffe (Producer, Programmer)
Alan Bridgman (Producer, Programmer)
Paul Drummond (Lead Artist)

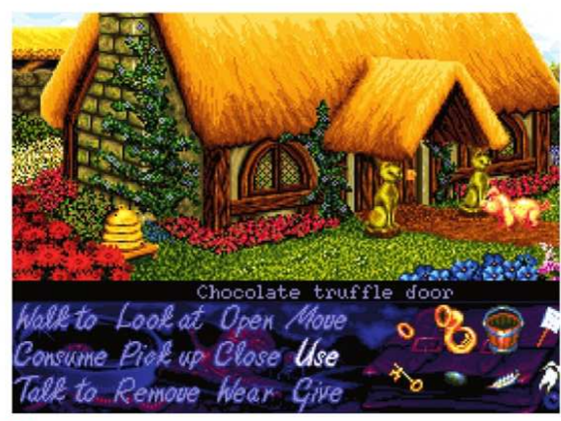


CAST YOUR MIND back to the glory days of the point-and-click adventure and two development companies immediately spring forth. LucasArts and Sierra were the undisputed masters of the genre, pooling talent from across America and pumping out one big-budget adventure after another. They dominated the market, and perhaps rightly so, but that's not to say that they monopolised the quality. Across the pond in our very own United Kingdom, a handful of British specialists were carving out their own niche within the massively popular genre.

One of the biggest operators in the field a the time was the Sutton Coldfield-based HorrorSoft, a family-run business which, as Adventure International UK, had started out converting Scott Adams' text adventures to various 8-bit micros, but had since expanded into its own productions. HorrorSoft had enjoyed some success with the *Elvira* and Waxworks series but soon changed its name to AdventureSoft when the time came to branch out. "I think we felt we had done enough horror and wanted to try that other traditionally difficult genre: comedy," explains AdventureSoft veteran Simon Woodroffe. "Of course, HorrorSoft wasn't exactly the ideal name for that change."

While at AdventureSoft, Simon worked alongside his father Mike. "I'd do the design and script writing and he would then go and 'get it made'. It worked okay because I'd typically work at home." And for their first comedy adventure together, the pair looked towards a number of classic British examples for inspiration. "We were huge fans of Terry Pratchett's work so we had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade him to grant us the licence to make *Discworld* games," explains Woodroffe. "As it happened, not getting that licence was probably the best result as it led us to Simon the Sorcerer – our Guybrush Threepwood." CONTINUED >.

NOT GETTING THE DISCWORLD LICENCE LED US TO SIMON THE SORCERER



We miss the days when your choice of response was always funny, funny, funny or funny.



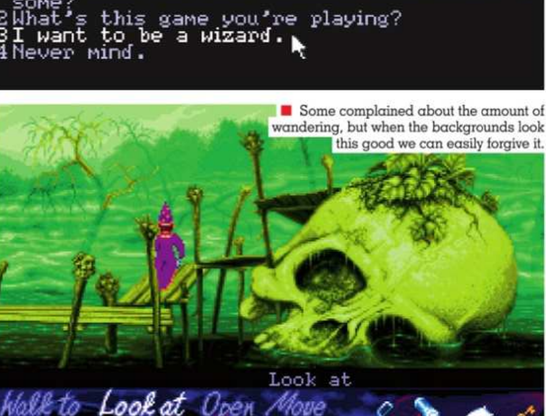




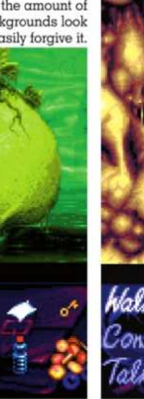




AdventureSoft's previous experience as HorrorSoft really comes through in some of *Simon The Sorcerer's* locales.







Some complained about the amount of wandering, but when the backgrounds look this good we can easily forgive it.







Simon's attempts to chat up the local ladies prove typically futile for an adventure hero.



Posted by:
BERTYBOTTYBITER

Simon The Sorcerer is the thatched cottage of games. It exudes an English-ness that is all too rare, not least thanks to the voice talent of Chris Barrie.

Posted by:
ROSETINTED GAMER

I remember the first time I played *Simon The Sorcerer*. I was working for Rank Xerox and was home with a terrible cold. I'd mail ordered it a week or so previous, and much to my joy it arrived in the post that morning. A fantastic game, it was bright, colourful, challenging and very amusing. It made what was generally a miserable day of snot, sore throat, shivers, aches and pains a whole lot more bearable.

Posted by:
ONTHINICE

As a kid I always felt bad having to escape from Swampling and his Mud Stew.

Posted by:
RYAN WHITELAW

I loved the fact that Chris Barrie did the voice work. It was the first example of a celebrity voice in a game I can think of.

Posted by:
ETERNALCYMRU

I loved it at the time and played it to death – mainly because it was about the only game I had and the graphics were good. It inspired me to try stuff like *Grim Fandango* and *Monkey Island*.

Posted by:
MISS MARVELLOUS

The characters were genius. Most memorable had to be the woodworm, arguing what kind of wood they want, before all agreeing in unison.

Posted by:
BERTYBOTTYBITER

I love a bit of balsa.



Simon was arguably at its funniest when it lampooned classic fairytales.

"Puzzle design and creating the scripts were the major challenges for me", says Woodroffe. "I refined scripts continuously as I was creating them. I wouldn't leave an encounter until all the scripts were as close to perfect as possible – you'd have thought that would make it a pretty fast process, but I found I was able to write effectively around two days a week with the other three spent trying to find inspiration for the next week's encounters." And when it was time to integrate puzzles into the scenarios, the team struggled even more. "The first *Simon The Sorcerer* was done backwards. The puzzles were merged into the world that was created to be a fairytale environment. The world wasn't created for the puzzles but for the characters, and the characters weren't created for the story, the story was wrapped around the characters we liked. They were created because we liked them. Essentially we had a lot of interesting character designs and a fairytale world, and we had to wrap puzzles and scripts around them to fit. Later on in the game, I think it was more planned first and then created to some kind of spec – and certainly the sequel was created in this way."

Despite these difficulties, the team at AdventureSoft were able to overcome the awkward flow of design and produce a game that looked, sounded and played just as well as anything the more experienced and better-funded studios in the States were able to develop. The reason for this, Woodroffe believes, is precisely due to the team's comparatively diminutive scale. "Our team was small," he concedes, "they all had multiple jobs on the project, but they were very focused and very talented individuals, who shared a common vision and passion for what they were doing. A team like that can cut a lot of communication corners and rework. It's the same basic principle behind the strike-team-type development we're currently using at Midway for

"I was watching a lot of *Blackadder*, *Red Dwarf* and *The Young Ones* at the time so there was a conscious effort to be very 'British' to help set ourselves apart from the smarter humour of *Monkey Island*, which was obviously a huge consideration when we were creating *Simon*. They had the interface and mechanics working perfectly and we didn't try to change them – what was the point? – we knew our limitations well and reinventing the wheel wasn't on our agenda."

Indeed, anyone who cared to play *Simon The Sorcerer*, either back in 1993 or now, would instantly spot the similarity between AdventureSoft's game and those of LucasArts. Ron Gilbert's SCUMM engine had become the definitive model for adventure delivery and with millions of players so familiar with the system, you'd be a fool to alienate them with anything too different. AdventureSoft didn't have SCUMM, of course, but it did have AGOS, an engine coded by AberMUD V creator Alan Cox, for HorrorSoft's first adventures and iterated on for each additional release. It wasn't perfect: some commands like 'consume' and 'wear' showed the engine's text adventure roots and could have easily been encompassed by a general 'use' command. But the system worked, nonetheless, and allowed the Woodroffes to concentrate on the really difficult stuff like the puzzles, story and humour.

I WAS WATCHING A LOT OF BLACKADDER. THERE WAS A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO BE 'BRITISH'

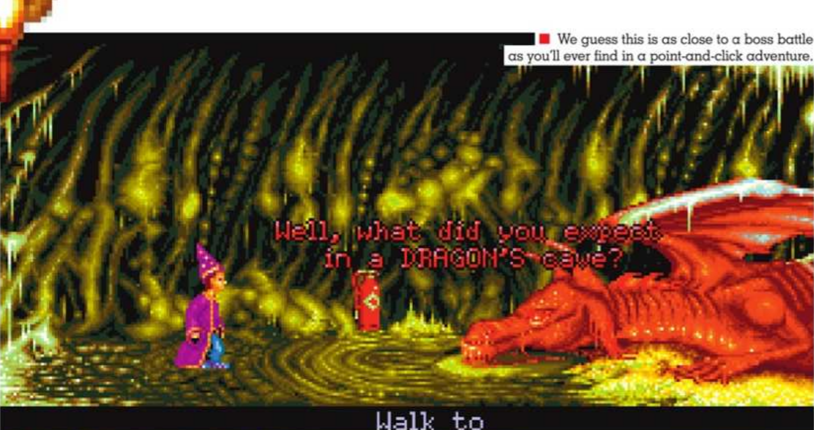


Pinball Wizard

AS WELL AS spawning four sequels, *Simon The Sorcerer* inspired a few spin-offs developed at AdventureSoft. The first was *Simon The Sorcerer's Pinball*, released between the second and third adventures. It kept the franchise going amid delays, but this below-average game ultimately damaged the property. Because the 3D render of Simon on the box was so much more advanced than the polygonal model in *Simon The Sorcerer 3D*, disappointment was inevitable. Then, in the same year, there was *Simon The Sorcerer's Puzzle Pack*, a compilation of *Simon*-themed puzzles and card games. It fared a little better, thanks to the inclusion of Swampy Adventure, a condensed quest featuring a popular NPC from the original *Simon* game.

individual features: very small teams, focused on a clear shared goal and providing support and enthusiasm for each other."

Perhaps indicative of the transitional time in which *Simon The Sorcerer* was produced, the small development team is almost outnumbered by the cast of voice actors. With the rise of CD-ROM in the early-Nineties, LucasArts and Sierra had experimented with 'talkie' soundtracks, and AdventureSoft was well placed to do the same, eventually releasing PC CD-ROM and Amiga CD32 versions of *Simon* with full speech that perfectly complemented the humour. "We had no hesitation about doing talkie," reveals Woodroffe. "It was 'the next big thing' to have voices in videogames and it helped propel *Simon* to another level of popularity… I was at all the recording sessions," he continues. "I absolutely loved doing them. I'd written every line of every conversation, and hearing it all being played out live was a great feeling. I'd heard them in my head over and over while I was writing them and I knew how each word should be inflected. Fortunately we had a good director who was able to translate me into something that actors could actually use."



We guess this is as close to a boss battle as you'll ever find in a point-and-click adventure.



THE VOICE ACTING throughout *Simon The Sorcerer* is consistently high quality, but the highlight is most definitely the inclusion of British television actor Chris Barrie as the voice of the hero. "I had written the role with Chris Barrie's voice in my mind," admits Woodroffe. "It was an easy choice to try and see if he was available to actually play the character. Honestly, I never suspected he would be interested, given that many of the other members of the cast weren't 'professional' actors, but he came and did it perfectly. He was a true pro from start to finish. Once he was in character, he'd flow through the script really fast, even helping out with a few of the side characters as he's a great impressionist as well."

SIMON WOODROFFE
Writer/Designer

When *Simon The Sorcerer* was released in the UK, it immediately grabbed the attention of the specialist press, most praising the quality of humour as well as the way in which AdventureSoft had managed to make a game that stood to comparison with the best American examples. This was still a few years before Revolution Software rose to fame with *Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Broken Sword*, leading many to hail AdventureSoft as the UK's answer to LucasArts. Sadly, the *Simon* series never quite achieved the same widespread popularity as *Monkey Island* et al, but it was successful enough within Europe to justify several sequels and spin-offs.

It wasn't just the sales or the reviews that made AdventureSoft aware of its satisfied fan base, however, as the Woodroffes were in the privileged position of being able to man the phones on their own helpline and speak to the players directly whenever anyone phoned for clues. "There was a phone in Mike's house with a separate number," reveals Woodroffe. "We all worked from home pretty much, though the art team had a room over a shop in Newcastle. The 'Hint Line' was something that me, Mike, my brother, and some of the testers, who were friends anyway, would take it in turns to do. That tradition carried on for a long time actually. The helpline was open for years, even when we did have an office and the team was much larger. It's true that I would be doing it about once a week and it's also true that I would ask people questions about their experience with the game. People would sometimes say, 'You've CONTINUED >.

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Monkey Island catapulted the adventure to popularity and inspired AdventureSoft to come up with its own Guybrush-style hero.



Simon The Sorcerer was envisioned as an official *Discworld* title – which was later developed by Perfect Entertainment in 1995.



What They Said...



Simon is a solidly constructed adventure with plenty of good, well thought-out puzzles and quite simply the funniest jokes ever to appear on an Amiga. If you fancy a laugh, there isn't any competition to this brilliant game

Amiga CD32 Gamer, Issue 4



Simon The Sorcerer 3 had to be scrapped and remade in 3D in an unrealisitc amount of time. The results were predictably poor.

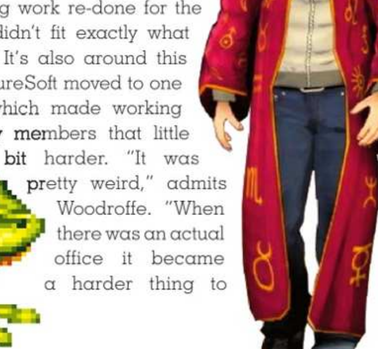
been really helpful. Can I have your name so I can write to the company?' so I'd tell them and they'd be pretty surprised. We did have a few that thought I *was* Simon the Sorcerer. They were kind of fun to talk to."

With such a reliable fan base installed, *Simon The Sorcerer* inevitably became a franchise and a number of sequels were developed. The second followed on directly from the first, and aside from the fact that it lacked Chris Barrie's voice acting, it's still considered the better game thanks to tighter design work and several changes made in response to criticism made through the AdventureSoft hint line. However, Woodroffe does feel that the sequel lacks some of the charm and personal touch of the original.



BY THE TIME SIMON II WAS DEVELOPED, THE TEAM HAD NEARLY DOUBLED IN SIZE

"THERE WAS LESS room for creativity around the team and I think the game suffered for it. It was more consistent, but that made it less appealing. By the time *Simon II* was being developed, the team had nearly doubled in size, making it much harder to keep everyone focused. I actually remember having work re-done for the first time as it didn't fit exactly what was asked for." It's also around this time that AdventureSoft moved to one central office, which made working alongside family members that little bit harder. "It was pretty weird," admits Woodroffe. "When there was an actual office it became a harder thing to manage. There were times when it would get a little dysfunctional. It's generally been much easier working for someone else since."



From there, things got progressively more difficult for AdventureSoft. Mike and Simon effectively closed down the company in 1998 and re-opened as Headfirst Productions, with an eye on branching out beyond the point-and-click genre. A third Simon adventure had been planned under AdventureSoft but hit several delays, and when it eventually materialised as a Headfirst game it was a disappointing 3D production that had clearly been rushed. Woodroffe explains: "The third game was done in 2D before it became 3D. It wasn't the same game.

It was completely different in every way. The whole story, characters, script, everything was redone for the transition to 3D. We needed, I think, about a hundred grand to finish the 2D *Simon 3*, but no one would give it to us. We were told repeatedly that 2D was dead and that nothing would sell in 2D.

Eventually someone was prepared to throw a lot more down for us to redo it in 3D. We really fucked that up of course, especially me, but the team wasn't ready for it, we didn't have any experience in 3D at all and we suddenly



■ Of all the sequels, only *Simon The Sorcerer II: The Lion, The Wizard, And The Wardrobe* comes anywhere near the brilliance of the original game. Some actually prefer it.

had nine months to build a brand new game from scratch. That, coupled with the fact we had already built most of it once, caused a lot of negativity and several original people left."

Headfirst Productions continued to struggle, mostly thanks to five troubled years developing *Call Of Cthulhu* games, and the Woodroffes soon sold the *Simon The Sorcerer* rights to Silver Style Entertainment in Germany. Silver Style developed *Simon The Sorcerer 4: Chaos Happens* for the German market, while Mike and Simon consulted on design, but the results were below the standard of the series and Woodroffe refuses to be drawn into discussing the 2007 release.

■■■ SILVER STYLE IS currently working on a fifth *Simon The Sorcerer* game, ensuring the series' survival, but it is clear now that the property will never reclaim the popularity it once enjoyed, and missed its chance to become as widely liked as the *Monkey Islands* and *Broken Swords* of this world. "I think the humour didn't age too well," says Woodroffe when asked why the 1993 original isn't as well remembered as its contemporaries. "At least people who liked it then still like it now," he continues, "but it's not something that appeals to new fans. That, coupled with the fact that the game sold poorly in the US, has ensured that the internet generation is less aware of it than they might otherwise be."

Personally, we have to disagree with Woodroffe on this one. In our opinion, the game has a lot to offer modern gamers. With adventures currently enjoying a new wave of popularity, there will be plenty of new point-and-click fans eager to plunder the genre's past and *Simon The Sorcerer* is a great place for them to start. The production values were so high at the time that the game still looks great today and the British style of humour remains unique to the series, giving it a cultural relevance that most other adventures lack. Handily, the game is still available to buy, either boxed from the AdventureSoft website, which has remarkably survived all these years, or as a digital download from Good Old Games. At the risk of sounding like an advertorial, we can't think of any reason why you wouldn't want to try it out right now.

What happened next?

From Simon The Sorcerer to The Wheelman…

■ AFTER THE RELEASE of *Simon The Sorcerer II: The Lion, The Wizard And The Wardrobe*, the Woodroffes developed a new sci-fi-themed adventure called *The Feeble Files*. Part inspired by the *X Files* craze of the time, this new IP was well received critically, but did not sell well and AdventureSoft was closed down. "We stopped doing it because we felt the adventure market couldn't provide the financials to do the games we wanted to do," explains Woodroffe, who moved from AdventureSoft to the new family business Headfirst Productions.

"We had the opportunity to go back to our horror roots and make *Call Of Cthulhu*. It was something publishers were keen to get involved in and we were able to sign it relatively quickly." Three *Cthulhu* games were planned but only one was ever finished after five years of delays. Headfirst completed three titles as a developer: *Simon The Sorcerer 3D*, *Deadlands* and *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth*, before going into administration in 2006. Mike Woodroffe is now presumed retired while Simon moved to Midway Newcastle where he recently directed *Wheelman*.







STARWING SNES [Nintendo] **1993**

AS MODERN technology grows evermore advanced, it's not just the old pixelated 2D games that provoke pangs of nostalgia. The first few attempts at 3D games now also look primitive enough to evoke memories of a bygone age. With their flat, shaded polygons; limited textures; and simple, angular geometric shapes, games like *Starwing* look almost nothing like their modern-day equivalents.

Though its sequel, *Lylat Wars*, superseded *Starwing* in every way, it's the blocky Legoland looks and garbled alien voices that see us occasionally choosing the 16-bit game over its 64-bit sequel. Now if Nintendo would only upload the game onto Virtual Console we could get our nostalgia fix without having to resort to nefarious means.


ENEMY



HELLO, SEGATA SANSHIRO!

■ WE MEET HIROSHI FUJIOKA, THE ACTOR WHO PLAYED SEGA MASCOT SEGATA SANSHIRO, TO PROFILE JAPAN'S MOST EXTROVERT VIDEOGAME LEGEND (AND YES, WE WERE A BIT INTIMIDATED)

HIROSHI FUJIOKA IS a burly chap and he appears fully committed to everything he does, even if that means answering the questions of pesky journalists like us. He made his movie debut in a 1965 flick called *Anko Tsubaki Wa Koi No Hana*, aged 19. Born in Ehime, Shikoku, the actor then went on to star in dozens of Japanese cinema classics, but he achieved even greater fame throughout Asia in the early-Seventies for his role in the *Kamen Rider* TV series. With his renowned skills in the martial arts, it seemed like the most obvious choice when Sega chose to employ Fujioka as a fearsome judo master of a Saturn-promoting character during the late-Nineties.

Fujioka began his work with Sega mid-1997, once the Saturn had been established as moderately successful in Japan. On 28 November that year, when the advert for *Sonic R* was broadcast on national television, he made his first appearance as Segata Sanshiro, a martial arts specialist whose reason for being was to command people to play Saturn games. He also performed in 16 radio commercials, which ran on local Japanese stations between 1997 and 1999, some of which were in the promotion of specific Saturn titles while others were image-building exercises and chances for the Segata Sanshiro message to be heard. A classic example, from the winter holiday of 1997, aimed at school and university students, went like this: "This is Hiroshi Fujioka, Segata Sanshiro. All of you students who are preparing for exams, soon you will be on the home stretch. Resist the urge to play Sega Saturn. Those of you who like games, resisting games may be painful, but your future prospects are precious. That's why you should resist games and focus on your studies. It's difficult for me to say this, but when spring comes, you will be free to play… Play Sega Saturn."

EVEN AWAY FROM his working life, Fujioka is intensely focused on the martial arts, so in many ways his role as Segata Sanshiro was a perfect match. Fujioka is a first dan in karate and iaido, as well as a third dan in judo, fourth in battodo and kotachi goshindo, and is a seventh-dan toudo master. "[Since I was] six years old, my father saw to it that I was trained to use a Japanese sword through practising the martial art of bushido," he explains, "so having been accustomed to the martial arts for such a long time, I felt in harmony with [the Segata Sanshiro character]."

Fujioka had been immediately impressed with Sega's ideas for this most visible and enigmatic of marketing characters. "I thought it was good that they wanted to send a strong message to children in an age when young people had no direction," he explains. The creation of the Segata Sanshiro character was not entirely the work of Sega's PR machine.

"I contributed some serious ideas myself," Fujioka reminds us, but this parody of 'Sugata' Sanshiro had already been decided upon when Fujioka turned up at Sega HQ one day in the summer of 1997. Sugata Sanshiro, incidentally, was the fictitious and eponymous lead character in the first film directed by the now-legendary Akira Kurosawa. Sugata Sanshiro learns to rely on judo, and the actor cast as the original Sanshiro, Susumu Fujita, bears a vague resemblance to Fujioka. For the Japanese public, Segata Sanshiro would be an obvious reference-in-parody to the first hero delivered by Kurosawa. Then there was the name itself, cleverly constructed to sound a lot like 'Sega Saturn, shiro' – an imperative that means 'Play Sega Saturn' – but which can also be interpreted as referencing the white colour of the then-standard Japanese Saturn SKU.

AFTER ACCEPTING THE proposed role, Fujioka was as determined as ever to exceed his employer's expectations. We ask about his motivation, other than his stern professional resolve and the obvious but unspoken financial benefits. "There were various motivations for me, but one enjoyable feature was that the role enabled me to influence society for good," he says without any irony. "My schedule was incredibly busy, but [Segata Sanshiro] had an effect on all sorts of people. The reaction from young people was particularly strong."

MY FATHER SAW TO IT THAT I WAS TRAINED TO USE A JAPANESE SWORD

The bulk of Fujioka's work as Segata Sanshiro centred on starring in TV commercials to promote Sega's latest games. The scenarios of these adverts were always related to the games they promoted, but set in a hyper-dramatic reality in which Sanshiro had scope to be active and heroic. The *Burning Rangers* advert was set inside a burning building (obviously), while the *Winter Heat* commercial showed Sanshiro racing a professional speed skater across an ice rink.

CONTINUED >.

PROFILE



Name: Hiroshi Fujioka
Born: 19 February 1946
Height: 6ft
Weight: 160lbs

LICENCES

Scuba-diving licence, radio ham licence, shooting licence, professional cook's licence, cruiser and powerboat licences, private pilot licence. Fujioka is also a member of the Screen Actors' Guild.

MAIN TV APPEARANCES

- 1971 - **Kamen Rider** – played a crime-fighting superhero called Takeshi Hongo
- 1982 - **Futari No Musashi** – took on the role of famous master swordsman Musashi Miyamoto, Often compared with Toshiro Mifune's role in Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*
- 1986 - **Tokuso Saizensen** – a serious police/ detective drama

MAIN FILM APPEARANCES

- 1984 - **Sword Kill** – an American film that won the Hero Award at Tokyo's International Fantastic Film Festival in 1986
- 1985 - **In The Line Of Duty, Part 3** – a Hong Kong action flick
- 1991 - **K2** – an American movie featuring a mountain-climbing theme
- 1992 - **About Love, Tokyo** – a Japanese film that received awards in Japan, France, and Germany
- 1999 - **Shogun Cop** – an American martial arts crossover movie

The Greatest Segata Sanshiro TV Ads

A run down of Sanshiro's most entertaining appearances in TV commercials for Saturn games. Osu!

BURNING RANGERS

Broadcast:
16 February 1998



A lady has passed out from inhaling the fumes of this inferno. Her younger sister is at her side and is telling her to stay strong. Who could possibly help her?



Segata Sanshiro bursts onto the scene and doesn't hesitate to perform mouth-to-mouth.



He even finds time to speak to the viewers: "Lifesaving."



Some *Burning Rangers* in-game footage rolls before the game splash appears…



…then it's back to the scene of the fire, where Segata Sanshiro is still breathing life into the lady in spite of the protestations of her younger sister. What a hero.

WINTER HEAT

Broadcast:
30 January 1998



Focused as ever, Segata Sanshiro is about to…



…race a speed skater barefoot across an ice rink. (No stuntman was involved in this production.)



Sanshiro takes an early lead…



…and comfortably wins the race.



Gameplay footage of *Winter Heat* is reeled.



The final scene shows Sanshiro nursing his feet by a stove while the speed skater mopes in the background. What a hero.

SATURN GAME MEDLEY

Broadcast:
25 December 1997



This early ad is set at dusk near a temple. Sanshiro makes an entrance with a giant Saturn and controller.



Just look at that determination.



After tying the Saturn to a tree…



…it's on to the pad-punching scene, which was performed with such vigour that it left Segata with bloodied fists.



After some footage of games like *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, the message is *clear*: "Play Sega Saturn."



The closing moments are left to Sanshiro, who fills them with a scowl of victory. What a hero.

SOLO CRISIS

Broadcast:
12 January 1998



Why it's that Segata Sanshiro fellow and he's standing behind a stack of roof tiles.



Shinken ni, shinken ni… (Focus, focus…)



Sanshiro suddenly stands back, and…



…smash! (Again, no stuntman was involved.)



A quick message: "When you're in trouble, use your head."



Solo Crisis: a game that demands that you use your noggin…



…even if it hurts to do so. What a hero.

VOX POPS

We mentioned the Segata Sanshiro name to a few Japanese citizens and they all immediately recalled their memories of the great man

"The theme song had great impact, and because Hiroshi Fujioka – who is really famous – was behind it, the Sanshiro character had great impact as well" Aya, 33

"I think Hiroshi Fujioka is a very funny guy. He has a comma in [the kanji characters of] his name. Segata Sanshiro was also a funny character. I think he made Sega Saturn very popular in Japan" Daisuke, 29

"I liked the theme song. It was very catchy" Megumi, 26



Sometimes there was no clear connection to anything: one of the earliest Segata Sanshiro appearances sees him beating up a group of "young punks" who "weren't focused", before reminding them, as would be his wont, to "Play Sega Saturn". The ad then cuts to promotional footage of *Sonic R*.

Fujioka has some fond memories of the production of these highly effective commercials: "Running around a skating rink barefoot without using a stuntman, breaking ten roof tiles with my head, punching an extra-large [Saturn] controller until my fist was bloody… I did all these things seriously, focused; I have strong memories of [performing those stunts]. I wanted to convey to the younger generation that whatever they do, if they make a serious effort, afterward they can enjoy this great sense of exhilaration. But to do so, I felt that I first had to charge into this experience myself, in order to make the idea understood. The staff and cast, all of us were united and putting in great effort. That's why on location, when we were filming the commercials, there was a good level of tension. I think everyone could see that reflected in our productions."

THE ADVERTS' RECURRING theme song, *Sega Saturn, Shiro*, which is sung throughout most of the teveision spots Sega produced, eventually became worthy of release as a CD single (see The Theme Song boxout). Fujioka sang the *Kamen Rider* theme song, *Let's Go!! Rider Kick*, for the first 13 episodes of that series, and released a handful of singles between his big break in 1971 and 1985, dabbling in love songs and pop, but this challenge was something else. While the version used in adverts and elsewhere had been sung by Ichiro Tomita, Fujioka was determined to do his own work in the studio when a CD single was at stake. "I was nervous when recording [the Segata Sanshiro theme song]," Fujioka openly admits. "But even today I love that song. If you listen to it, your blood will begin to flow and you'll start to feel courageous and brave. I'm grateful that I was able to sing such a powerful song."

Fujioka's workload also included appearances at promotional events, and he seems, characteristically, to have relished playing the Segata Sanshiro role in such circumstances. "Yes, I performed at various events," he reminisces. "Each time I turned up, there were many fans gathered to greet me, and I was really happy to hear their comments and receive their support. At those events, the message of the TV commercials was repeated to make sure that it was clearly understood. I really looked forward to such opportunities."

BY 1998, SEGATA Sanshiro was a sufficiently popular and well-recognised character for Sega to produce an entire game starring Fujioka as Sanshiro. The result of this collaboration was a title called *Segata Sanshiro Shinkenyugi*, the 'Shinkenyugi' bit meaning 'serious sports', which is appropriate enough when the mini-games in this compendium are based on Fujioka's daring stunts from Sanshiro's television appearances. Of *Shinkenyugi*, Fujioka tells us: "I was happy [for the Segata Sanshiro game to be developed]. I thought it was something worth doing, but I also felt some responsibility. Of course, I've heard various things about the game…" We'd venture a guess that Fujioka is tacitly admitting that it wasn't a great game – and he'd be right – but it's not without its own inimitable charm, and we'll always have time for head chopping slates or pulling judo-disco shapes…

IF YOU MAKE AN EFFORT, YOU TOO CAN ENJOY A SENSE OF EXHILARATION

Happily, we can report that Sanshiro wasn't a hypocrite. While he was CONTINUED >.



Segata demonstrates his approach to playing *International Track & Field*. Confident, aggressive, but not as effective as it needs to be.

Fujioka's More Recent Exploits

ALTHOUGH HIS ROLLING contract with Sega is at an end, Hiroshi Fujioka recently appeared as Rambo to promote Sega's new coin-op based on the Stallone movie. He did a fine, intense impersonation and enjoyed his hands-on experience of the forthcoming lightgun game. In 2000, he also made a cameo appearance in *Rent-A-Hero No 1*. Away from games, Fujioka was the face of Nescafé last year, and he also starred in a series of Suntory beer commercials, which have been running on Japanese TV for the past couple of months.



The Saturn may have long since retired, but this one-man marketing campaign is still promoting games… and coffee.

The Theme Song

■ ALL TOGETHER NOW: "Segata Sanshiro… Sega Saturn… shiro." These are some of the memorable lyrics to the theme song from Fujioka's Segata Sanshiro TV commercials, a ditty that was released as a three-inch CD single in response to popular demand and which went on to sell more than a hundred thousand copies across Japan. The rest of the lyrics are spent imploring young people to "play seriously every day" and to "tell people who can't seem to have any fun on their own to play Sega Saturn." Sanshiro also reminds them that: "There are pastimes outside tennis, karaoke, clubs, and chasing girls." Each verse of the song leads to a repeated conclusion: kids should play more Sega Saturn games.

admonishing everyone to "Play Sega Saturn" the man behind the message, Hiroshi Fujioka himself, was a genuine fan of Sega's Saturn output. "I played and even really enjoyed [Sega's games]," he tells us. "I think those games reflected the era. Also, I think they put out a message to the world."

Fujioka likes to emphasise the ideological resonance of his Segata Sanshiro character. He believes it was necessary to convey 'the message' to the younger generation in the late-Nineties. The more obvious reason that Sanshiro is so well loved and well remembered, however, is his sense of humour, which carries through every in-character appearance he made during his tenure as the fearsome face of Sega. When he's surrounded by zombies in the TV ad for *The House Of The Dead*, he scowls and says: "These aren't humans", as though he has only just realised the fact and is outraged that he hadn't been informed of their ghastliness some time earlier.

Another time, on the scene of the *Burning Rangers* advert, Segata Sanshiro is giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to a woman and doesn't seem too troubled by the inferno around them – by the end of the ad he seems to have completely forgotten the notion of escaping the building. Meanwhile, the commercial for *Pro Baseball Greatest Nine '98* placed Sanshiro in a batting centre scenario, but instead of using a bat to slog the incoming volley of baseballs, he kicks one for a homerun before showing off his masculinity by revealing a bare chest and allowing half a dozen balls to pelt him in the midriff. Without flinching.

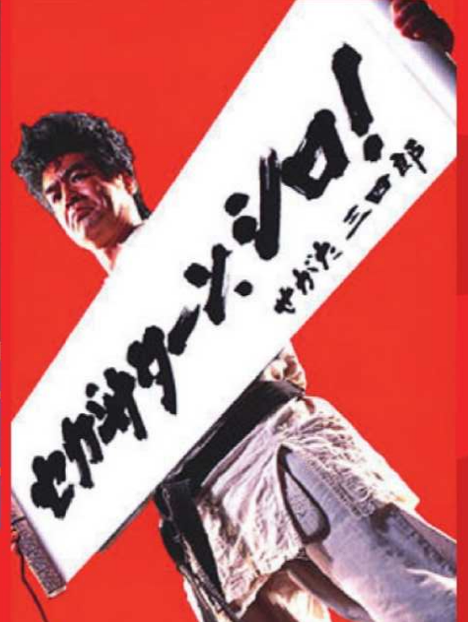
BY THE END of 1998, the Dreamcast launch was imminent and virtually all Saturn game development had been terminated, leaving the obviously Saturn-tied Segata Sanshiro with just one last obligation: to go out with a bang by ushering in the Dreamcast era. And how he did it. Sanshiro leaped from the roof of Sega HQ to prevent the company building from being hit by an incoming missile, as the inspirational Segata Sanshiro theme song blared away and Sega employees looked in awe from their office windows. It was the great last sacrifice in Sega Sanshiro's quest, although Fujioka showed up in character at the Dreamcast launch and looked alive and well.

I ENJOY SEGA'S GAMES – THEY PUT A MESSAGE OUT TO THE WORLD

Hiroshi Fujioka later provided the voice of Ryo Hazuki's father in the Japanese versions of *Shenmue* and *Shenmue II*, but the Segata Sanshiro character had at last been retired. He was brought back into commission for a one-off special programme on Fuji TV at the end of 1999, but other than that appearance it was game over. In the space of two classic Saturn-game-packed years in Japan, Sanshiro had left a marketing legacy that included books, T-shirts, action figures, CDs, and games, all of which are still sought after by local Sega fans. We ask Fujioka to confirm that Segata Sanshiro is as dead as Elvis. He concurs but remains positive: "I'm not contracted [to Sega] at present, but if there's some new project then I'd definitely like to participate. I think Segata Sanshiro still delivers a good message even today, so a revival would be interesting…"



■ As well as starring in some pretty funny advertisements, the Segata Sanshiro character also made some popular public appearances.





THE GAME

AS WELL as being the key promotional tool for Saturn wares in Japan, Hiroshi Fujioka's Segata Sanshiro character starred in an original Saturn game that preceded *Segagaga* as one of the few obviously self-referential products released by a Japanese game company. *Segata Sanshiro Shinkenyugi* is a collection of mini-games and bonus materials, all at least loosely based on the TV ad antics of Segata Sanshiro. Here's a breakdown of the ten mini-games you can expect to find if you track down a copy of this novel import:







"Show The True Nature Of Your Dance"
■ Memorise the buttons/keys shown and then repeat the sequence to make a crude Segata Sanshiro sprite 'dance'.





"Emergency Explosion. Come And Attack"
■ Grapple with a Bomberman-esque wrestler in a minefield. Ten detonations earn a victory.





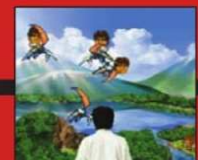


"Here You Are! This Is A Present From Me"
■ Ride a sleigh, dressed in a Santa Claus outfit, throwing sacks of presents down chimneys without bumping into buildings or seagulls.





"When You're In Trouble, Use Your Head"
■ Smash a stack of roof tiles with Sanshiro's noggin. This game has simple meter controls and satisfyingly crunchy sound effects.


"Secret Technique. This Is The Dragon King Power"
■ Spot the tiny Segata Sanshiros flying across the screen on dragonback, then input the correct number once your time is up.







"Wait! I'll Definitely Rescue You"
■ A simple auto-scrolling fire-dodging platform run. The intro reveals that Segata Sanshiro can hear a pin drop from 3km away.



"Who Really Am I?"
■ This is an oddly dull card game where you need to find a number of Sanshiro cards among a pack of 60.







"Run! My Burning Spirit"
■ Tap A and C to make Segata Sanshiro run on ice (as per the *Winter Heat* advert) – preferably without his limbs freezing up.







"My Training Will Not Be Hindered"
■ Chop or kick the items being hurled at Sanshiro. This is like the early *Rhythm Tengoku* stage, but without the musical reaction.





"Crash Course. The Sea Is Also My Battlefield"
■ This is an underwater game of *Columns*, in which you have to prevent an image of Segata Sanshiro from drowning.



Little Computer People Commodore 64 [Activision] **1985**

DECADES BEFORE WILL Wright thought up the idea for *Spore* and long before *The Sims* took the world by storm, Activision had already realised the dream of creating the illusion of artificial life within the confines of a television screen. *Little Computer People* was a mind-blowing concept in 1985. Each disk came with a unique digital character inside who would go about his business, playing piano, using the phone and taking baths. The player could even use text commands to interact with him although the limited AI meant that he rarely did as he was told. Still, all the little guy had to do was tap on the inside of the screen to get your attention, and you fell back into the illusion that you were interacting with a fictional character.





BEHIND THE SCENES

COMIX ZONE

Released during the advent of the 32-bit era, Sega's Comix Zone never really got the attention it deserved but gained a strong cult following in later years. Now games™ meets the designers behind the Mega Drive's most original brawler and ponders what could have happened had it been made that little bit earlier



Release: 1995
Format: Mega Drive
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega Technical Institute

KEY STAFF:
Peter Morawiec (Designer)
Adrian Stephens (Programmer)
HowardDrossin (Composer)
Roger Hector (Producer)

Comix Zone's story begins with Peter Morawiec, an Eastern European artist who was hired to work at the Sega Technical Institute (STI) in America in 1991. The new studio had been set up as a joint project between Sega of America and Japan's Sonic Team in order for the Japanese talent to tutor up-and-coming Western developers. Morawiec's first task within the studio was to create the art for the highly impressive special stages in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, but by the following year he had graduated to the position of game designer on *Sonic Spinball*.

During the development of *Spinball*, Morawiec put together a design for a completely original Mega Drive project, which, according to STI manager Roger Hector, was one of the best design pitches the company had ever seen. "Peter came to me one day and wanted to show me a video he had made," recalls Hector. "It was an animation that he had created to illustrate a game concept where the player must solve each frame of a literal comic book, page by page. It was a breathtaking job he had done all by himself. He'd captured the entire essence of an original idea and illustrated it beautifully while being highly animated and set to music. It was fantastic. Easily the best presentation of a game concept I had ever seen. There was no doubt, after viewing it, that this was a game that STI had to make."

Morawiec explains the processes that led to his concept video. "Growing up in Eastern Europe I very much loved whatever Western comics filtered



A rare special move saw Sketch momentarily transform into a superhero, much to his own surprise.

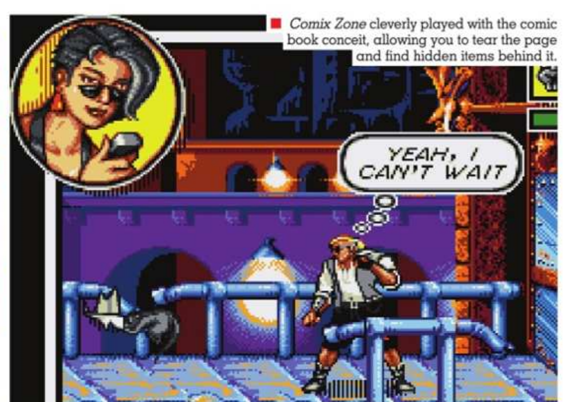




THERE WAS NO DOUBT AFTER VIEWING IT THAT COMIX ZONE WAS A GAME THAT STI HAD TO MAKE





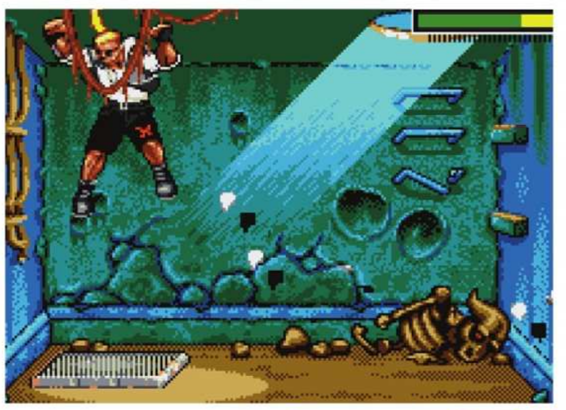


Comix Zone cleverly played with the comic book conceit, allowing you to tear the page and find hidden items behind it.



The opening animation shows lead character Sketch Turner being dragged into his own comic world by the villain he created.









Comix Zone is one of toughest games on Mega Drive and usually doesn't even give you an extra life. A decision the team now regrets.



FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

TRIGGERHAPPYTEL

I still rate *Comix Zone* as one of Sega's best and most innovative games. Apart from the fact it had a really sharp premise and a good combat engine, its comic cells format was really inventive and Sketch Turner was a great protagonist. I never did manage to finish it though - it was bastard hard, and I could never beat the last level. Definitely overdue an HD remake.

SWOOPER D

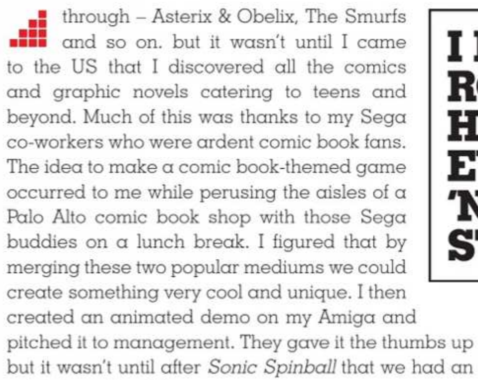
Was a great game when released and the "trapped in a comic" premise was more endearing than it possibly should have been. The script was good, the characters memorable and the combat was tight. Even nice little ideas like sending your pet rat to throw switches seemed cool. Was a tiny game, only 6 pages (levels) but was one of those games so perfectly formed the length didnt matter, particularly as it was so frikkin hard! Once, just once, I made it to the final boss and was completely and utterly raped by him. 11 year old me had never felt such violation. I tried to a few times after that but the pressure not to be completely prepared for the final boss (full health, one of Sketch's little drinky things, a bomb and my, erm, rat) meant I never got to him again.

SICKMOTH

I thought it looked amazing, in fact it still does, but I only got to play the first few screens before I was dead. Not literally dead. I'm still here.







through – Asterix & Obelix, The Smurfs and so on. but it wasn't until I came to the US that I discovered all the comics and graphic novels catering to teens and beyond. Much of this was thanks to my Sega co-workers who were ardent comic book fans. The idea to make a comic book-themed game occurred to me while perusing the aisles of a Palo Alto comic book shop with those Sega buddies on a lunch break. I figured that by merging these two popular mediums we could create something very cool and unique. I then created an animated demo on my Amiga and pitched it to management. They gave it the thumbs up but it wasn't until after *Sonic Spinball* that we had an official go-ahead."

I REMEMBER ASKING ROGER HECTOR IF IT HAD AT LEAST BROKEN EVEN, AND HE SAID 'NO!' AS IF IT WERE A STUPID QUESTION

The original concept video for *Comix Zone*, as well as the hand-drawn level designs, reveals that the final game differed little from the initial idea. Almost everything from those original designs is present in the game and works terrifically, making for one of the most fun and original beat-'em-ups on the Mega Drive. For those who haven't actually played *Comix Zone*, allow us to explain its genius. The player takes control of Sketch Turner, an artist who has been transported into the pages of his own comic book by the super-villain he created. Within the physical confines of the comic itself Sketch must physically move through each panel and every page, fighting off his own creations and solving special puzzles as he goes. As well as demonstrating a fairly solid fighting system, *Comix Zone* really stood out for its inventive level design. Sketch could move through the comic's panels in a variety of ways, by leaping between the borders of each image, ripping through them or by dropping down to the one underneath, which added a non-linear element and a little replayability to the game. It was so well done that the player really felt as though they were trapped inside a comic book and literally fighting their way through each page. An extra layer of depth was also added by being able to rip parts of the pages. Sketch was able to tear a piece of the page from the background and fold it into a paper plane to be thrown at the enemies while his pet rat, Roadkill, could sniff out and uncover hidden power-ups from behind pages.

Roadkill could also be used to solve some puzzles as his small size allowed him to enter hard-to-reach areas and activate switches. For most *Comix Zone* players he became an essential part of the gameplay and a much-loved feature in the game. For such an important element, however, nobody seems to know exactly who can be credited with coming up with the idea. "To be honest, I don't remember exactly," says Morawiec. "We were a closely knit core team and we would oftentimes brainstorm together. Sidekick characters were pretty much a must back then, but I was looking for a sidekick who wouldn't get in the way of the main character. I think either Howard Drossin (the composer) or I came up with the rat idea, it fit those requirements nicely and made for a fitting pet for Sketch, who was a tough grunge-rocker type of guy." Regardless of who invented Roadkill however, his inclusion was just one of many small touches that built up to make *Comix Zone* such a fun and unique game to play, as well as a testament to the masterminds behind its design.





In an age with so many "me-too" games. *Comix Zone* demands to be noticed with it's totally unique look, feel and style. Although I think I've seen this idea in a few cartoons, this is the first time in a video game and I'm quite impressed.
Electronic Gaming Monthly, Issue 72, July 1995

If *Comix Zone* is a triumph of game design, then, it equally represents a masterclass in programming. The coder at the helm of *Comix Zone* was Adrian Stephens, an STI newcomer who became good friends with Morawiec and even went on to found an independent studio with him in 1996. "I had been recruited by STI to work on Saturn games because of my 3D experience," explains Stephens. "But when the Saturn was delayed, I needed to find another project to work on in the meantime, and Peter Morawiec had a great idea for a Genesis game that sounded like an interesting challenge. I performed all the programming of the game and tools and was also the director of the technology involved. Getting the game to fit in 2MB, and dynamically decompressing and paging in and out graphical elements while the game was running was a big challenge. We needed to be able to scroll across a large page of graphics that not only wouldn't fit in the VRAM all at once, but actually wouldn't all fit in RAM either, so a lot of the processing power was devoted to frantically decompressing data in the background. If you try to compress a bunch of Genesis ROM images you'll find *Comix Zone* will shrink the least. That's testament to how compressed everything in it is already. We really managed to pack a lot into that 2MB. I was also quite pleased with the speech bubbles. Consoles like the Genesis were not really designed with things like proportional fonts and dynamically generated graphics in mind, but we got it to work."

What's also astounding about the use of memory in *Comix Zone*, is the unusual number of sounds to be heard. The actual musical score was composed by Howard Drossin in an appropriately grungy rock style, with heavy guitars and drums throughout. Interestingly, the soundtrack was reworked for CD and re-recorded with real instruments, with Drossin himself playing the guitar, and a friend adding vocals to the original instrumental tracks. The CD was given away free with the original production run of the game. And for those who heard it, it added a new layer of depth to the game itself, as hearing the chip music allowed the player to form a much grander soundtrack in their own heads

Auction Action

Rare comic book auctions may be ten-a-penny on eBay but 'Comix' auctions don't come along so often. The original Mega Drive game is in plentiful supply while the free soundtrack is a little more valuable, as is the scarce Game Boy Advance conversion. The real money, however, is in the Japanese Mega Drive release. The game was released in very small quantities and is thought to be one of the rarest Mega Drive games in existence, often fetching in excess of £200. Work-in-progress material has been known to crop up for auction too, as Peter Morawiec found much to his surprise when a friend emailed him a link to an auction for a 100-page Comix Zone design document from 1994. For fans of the game, the pictures that appeared in the auction (and are reproduced here) offer a rare glimpse into the internal design process at Sega.

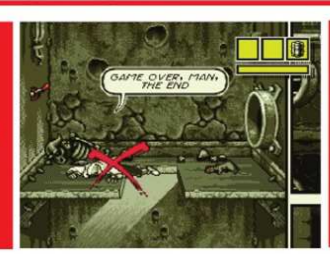


■ The original level designs, kindly supplied by Peter Morawiec, clearly show how well planned each of the stages was.

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

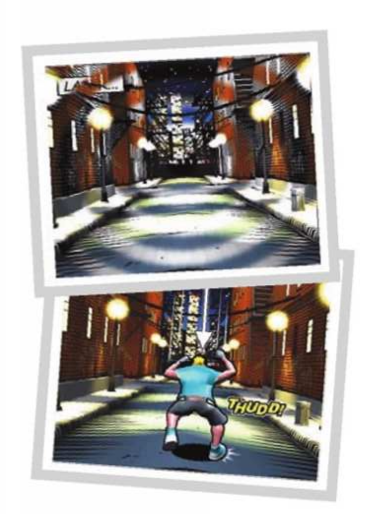


There were tons of great comic book based games before *Comix Zone*. But games literally set inside a comic? Not so many.



Comix Zone's sequel was canned and few games followed in its footsteps. *XIII* did a good job of creating an in-comic illusion though.





based on the CD they had previously listened to. It's a strange phenomenon that is peculiar to the 16-bit age as a handful of publishers (most notably SquareSoft) would occasionally release orchestrated scores of their in-game music, which often had the unexpected side effect of allowing the player to understand exactly what kind of sound the composer had originally aimed for. With the dawn of CD-ROM as a videogame medium, however, this phenomenon quickly disappeared, making *Comix Zone* one of the last games of its kind.

As well as the excellent rock soundtrack, *Comix Zone* also pushed the Mega Drive's audio capabilities to their limit with a series of character voices that were actually recorded by the game's developers – Peter Morawiec voiced Gravis, one of the game's recurring villains. "It was just some silliness at Howard's studio. Gravis was a robot, so I wanted a synthesised, metallic-sounding voice. Howard would always be teasing me about my accent and wanted to immortalise my voice within the game. We recorded the phrases, then applied various filters to get the desired effect. I don't speak that way, trust me."

Despite its technical achievements, however, *Comix Zone* was far from a perfect game. Granted, it was wholly original and cleverly constructed, but it was also extremely difficult. Very few of the enemies can be easily defeated without Sketch taking some damage – a situation made much worse by the fact that there are no extra lives and only one Continue, which is only awarded once on the second stage and once on the third. "I wish we hadn't cranked up the difficulty at the last minute, which made it nearly impossible to finish, at the urging of the test department," says Morawiec. Stephens adds: "We had a very comprehensive and complicated scripting system for enemy AI that I'd probably do differently now. Peter has always wanted more control over things like that than is probably good for him. Generally, it probably would have been better to keeps things simpler and get the game out sooner than we did."

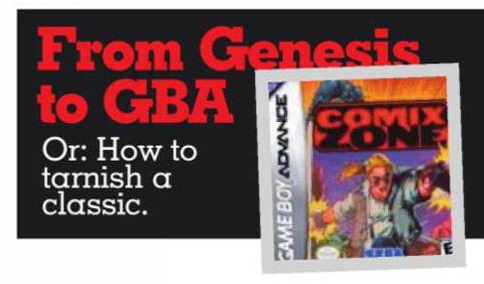
Having spent so long in development, *Comix Zone*'s biggest problem was that it hit retail so late on in the Mega Drive's life. The game debuted in the States in early 1995 but didn't reach a global audience until October of the same year. By this point the PlayStation and Saturn had both been launched worldwide, causing many gamers to abandon the old formats in favour of the newer and more exciting three-dimensional graphics, which these newer consoles offered. Needless to say, *Comix Zone* did not sell particularly well. "It was a shame," says Stephens. "Our

I DEVELOPED A QUICK PITCH FOR A 3D-BASED COMIX ZONE, THERE WERE SOME ENQUIRIES FROM MARVEL AND A LOT OF INTEREST FROM JAPAN, BUT NOTHING EVER CAME OUT OF IT AS FAR AS I KNOW



From Genesis to GBA

Or: How to tarnish a classic.



RELEASED IN 2002 in very limited quantities, the GBA version of *Comix Zone* is something of an unknown quantity to most fans, especially as the European version was inexplicably absent from the UK. Us Brits aren't missing out on much, though; the screen size was reformatted to fit the small GBA screen and resulted in the edges of each adjacent panel being removed from sight. Fans of the game subsequently complained that the new layout lessened the illusion of being inside a comic and made the game feel more like your traditional beat-'em-up.



timing was definitely off. I remember asking Roger Hector if it had at least broken even, and he said 'No!' as if it were a stupid question. It also affected our ability to move onto Saturn development ourselves, and I think neither STI nor the Saturn ever recovered from that. Of course, the Saturn would have been a huge success if we had been unleashed upon it from the start," he adds jokingly.

As we all know, sales figures are often completely unrelated to the quality of a game and in *Comix Zone*'s case they are totally irrelevant. Over a decade after its initial release, the game is still managing to build up a strong cult following as an increasing number of Sega fans are now discovering the game for the first time. The original cartridge can be found for around the £2 mark in most games shops while the game also tends to crop up on retro compilations quite often. Yojiro Ogawa, head of game design at Sonic Team, is also known to be a huge fan of *Comix Zone* and was personally responsible for including the game as a bonus in Sonic Mega Collection. The game has also made appearances on the Xbox Live Arcade, Mega Drive Collection and Wii's Virtual Console, as well as ports to Game Boy Advance and PC, making it one of the most re-released Mega Drive games in the history of Sega's back catalogue.



PETER MORAWIEC
Designer, lead artist and voice actor

Comix Zone has never been more popular and the game is destined to become more than simply a cult classic as it continues to receive the level of exposure it has enjoyed over the last couple of years: a fact the development team couldn't be more pleased about. "I think it's still one of my better games and I constantly meet people who remember it fondly," says Morawiec. "It was pretty unique and we actually pulled it off, which wasn't all that easy on the Genesis. It was my first original game, which I was involved in A-to-Z, so it was very exhilarating for me to see the final product hit the shelves."

"My children were interested in playing it a couple of weeks ago so we downloaded an emulator and found the ROMs online," reveals Stephens. "It's very odd to see something you created so long ago under such different circumstances. I think it all seemed a little simple to them, just 2D, so they couldn't understand why it took so long to make. And to be honest, neither could I, though I remember it all seeming very involved and complicated at the time. Anyway, it inspired my son to make an animation of himself being sucked into his drawings, so it was all worth it in the end."

Our *Comix Zone* story doesn't quite end here, though. As STI was focused on developing character-based games, the potential for sequels was always considered and *Comix Zone* was no exception. "We began working on a Sonic-themed Saturn game as our next project," says Morawiec, presumably referring to the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme*. "I developed a quick pitch for a 3D-based *Comix Zone* during some downtime, including a sample storyboard, which showed how the character might transition in and out of comic book panels in a 3D implementation. I seem to recall that there were some enquiries from Marvel and a lot of interest from Japan to create licensed *Comix Zone* games, but nothing ever came out of it as far as I know."

With Sega Japan's obvious love for the *Comix Zone* series, it seems possible that a 3D sequel may some day emerge, although the question remains whether the page-turning mechanic of the comic book world could even work in three dimensions. Besides which, both Morawiec and Stephens have long since left Sega so a brand new development team would have to be used. The realistic assumption is that *Comix Zone* will remain a one-of-a-kind oddity, to stand alone and live on, not through overused character licences, but through the merits of its own individual and unchallenged gameplay.

Special thanks go to Peter Morawiec for kindly taking the time to unearth all the archive material for this feature.

Where are they now?

■ Not everyone involved in the making of *Comix Zone* stayed in the games industry, so here's a rundown of what they did next. The vast majority of the design team, including Peter Morawiec and Adrian Stephens, remained at STI through the development of *The Ooze* and the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme* before founding independent developer Luxoflux and making *Vigilante 8* and *True Crime*. Kunitake Aoki, the only Japanese person to work on Comix Zone, eventually joined Nintendo and worked on *Metroid Prime: Hunters* and *Mario Vs Donkey Kong*, among other games. Composer Howard Drossin and STI boss Roger Hector eventually both left the industry. Drossin went on to compose the scores for a slew of Hollywood movies, including Blade Trinity and Jet Li's Danny The Dog. Hector, meanwhile, works for Namco Bandai, owns a custom sports car manufacturer, and has become a well-respected artist, specialising in photoreal automobile art.



Hall Of Fame...

SOLID SNAKE

"Unfortunately, killing is one of those things that gets easier every time you do it" Solid Snake was a true Eighties icon

THROUGHOUT THE EIGHTIES, the game industry was rife with the classic, pure mechanics of perfect gaming. If you could jump on a turtle, gobble up fruit, dodge a laser and throw a punch, then all was well. Then Hideo Kojima was asked to create a game for the non-mainstream MSX home computer. Kojima has often stated how problematic this was. The MSX hardware was far from perfect, its capabilities severely below that of the home consoles of the time. This essentially meant that, for Kojima to create a groundbreaking game, he would need inspiration; a new angle of gameplay that would limit the number of sprites on screen and suit a non-scrolling mechanic so the MSX could run it. A passionate film buff – he originally intended to become a film director – Kojima was influenced by movie design from day one. The answer to the MSX riddle was found in the film *The Great Escape* as Kojima settled on the concept of escape. This, in turn, produced a problem: heroes don't run away. A fleeing lead character is far from popular. Therefore, the concept was turned on its head and the world witnessed the birth of its most popular stealth game.

The revolutionary *Metal Gear* gameplay was just one of Kojima's two main innovations. The second was storyline. *Metal Gear* had a maturity of storytelling far superior to the majority of its rivals at the time. In retrospect, the idea of a rookie agent of a black ops and espionage unit, briefed with the mission of disarming and destroying the bipedal, nuclear weapon Metal Gear, who comes to realise the founder of his unit is also the corrupt leader of the villainous army, seems highly clichéd. Compare it to stories of a plumber jumping on turtles, or a yellow face that eats blobs while avoiding slightly larger blobs, and suddenly it seems like a masterpiece. The influence is obvious. The Eighties was the golden age of action movies, with innumerable villains threatening humanity with nuclear warheads or killer robots. Even the cover art of *Metal Gear* is identical to a scene with Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn) from *Terminator*. *Metal Gear* may not be an epic, but it helped establish a sincerity of in-game plots, which paved the way for today's more fully realised stories.

It wasn't just Solid Snake's image that was a direct reflection of Hollywood cinema at the time, his personality was also comparable to the movies. His determination to get the job done at all costs while unflinchingly sticking to his moral compass and beliefs was the epitome of the Eighties hero. Kojima capitalised on Snake's heroism at the start of *Metal Gear* with a key evocative tool: abandonment. On entry into Outer Heaven, Snake is dropped by a plane, along with three others who suddenly disappear, leaving Snake with nothing. He has no guns and not even a knife. This opening scene is the most important of all in the early series for two reasons: it places the emphasis entirely on Solid Snake himself as he has no tools and no help. It puts the player directly into Snake's shoes because he has no back story and there is nothing between the player and the character.

FINALLY, THE ORIGINAL series was capped off with the sublime *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, successfully completing the series' riches-to-rags-to-riches turnaround. It was here that Kojima displayed his creative direction (for the original series) with the most clarity. *Metal Gear 2* amplified the filmic feel of the original with a greatly increased stable of characters and plot points. As Kojima himself has stated on more than one occasion, the lead cast of *Metal Gear 2* were based on movie icons of the time, with Snake this time resembling the then blossoming Mel Gibson, alongside Sean Connery and Dolph Lundgren lookalikes Big Boss and George Kasler among others. The story was wonderfully interwoven with subtle (and often less subtle) plot points, such as the death of Natasha Marcova. Each character was also supported by a mature back story that, along with the overall story arc, made *Metal Gear 2* a prime example of the videogame as a storytelling medium.

Hideo Kojima has previously stated that a videogame's lead character is the most important element of its story, citing audience association as the key to involving the player. Kojima has continually qualified this opinion. Solid Snake's lonesome mission, in which he starts with nothing and must equip himself with weapons and information along the way to overcome a fearsome enemy territory, is distinctly of the 'lone hero fighting for humanity' archetype. Both story and character are instantly associable. In 1987, the gaming world stepped directly into Snake's shoes with nothing more than a pack of cigarettes and a pair of bare fists. The world of *Metal Gear* has grown exponentially over the past 21 years – not just with games, but also with comic books, action figures, novels, a film is rumoured for a 2009 release, and there's even a radio drama in Japan – but the direct link between Solid Snake and his fans has been maintained. Kojima emphatically achieved Snake's audience association with the original *Metal Gear*. Now, for Snake's twenty-first birthday, Solid Snake is set to rise to power with the gargantuan *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots*.

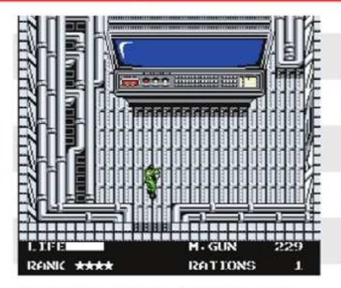
>. MAGIC MOMENTS



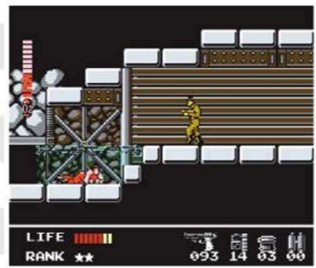
■ Snake is dropped into the battlefield for the very first time, along with three companions who… go… somewhere?



■ One of the earliest – and best – translation errors. This one only appears in the NES version.



■ Hideo Kojima finished *Metal Gear* by revealing the computer he wished it was designed for… "Now, that's a computer."



■ Snake goes side-scrolling in *Snake's Revenge's* one addition to the *Metal Gear* formula.

FACE

In the original *Metal Gear*, Snake closely resembles Kyle Reese from *Terminator*. In *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, he is similar to Mel Gibson.

HAIR

Snake has aged significantly since the original, with *Metal Gear Solid 4* showing him greying and with a moustache.

CHARACTER

Due to the limitations of the MSX home computer, much of the character's details are told through in-game text narrative.

GUN

In *Metal Gear*, Snake starts out with nothing more than his bare fists (perhaps under-prepared given his mission) and must acquire weapons and equipment en route.

NAME

Snake is named after Snake Plissken, Kurt Russell's character in *Escape From New York*, which Hideo Kojima cites as one of his favourite films.

GEAR

Snake carries a lot of tools and gadgets on his missions. Among these is the transceiver, used to communicate with other characters in-game.

BOOTS

Snake may have forgotten to pack a gun, but he remembered his trusty wellies. Just as well, given the wide range of terrain he has to tackle.

UNIFORM

Snake has made use of a great variety of uniforms and face paint throughout his career. The original sees him in traditional US Special Forces uniform.



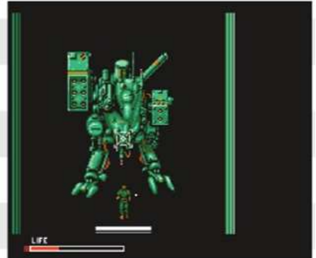
■ If you've made it this far into *Snake's Revenge* then feel free to bask in your own glory. You are the chosen few.



■ Natasha Marcova is killed in one of *Metal Gear: Solid Snake's* many delightful plot points.



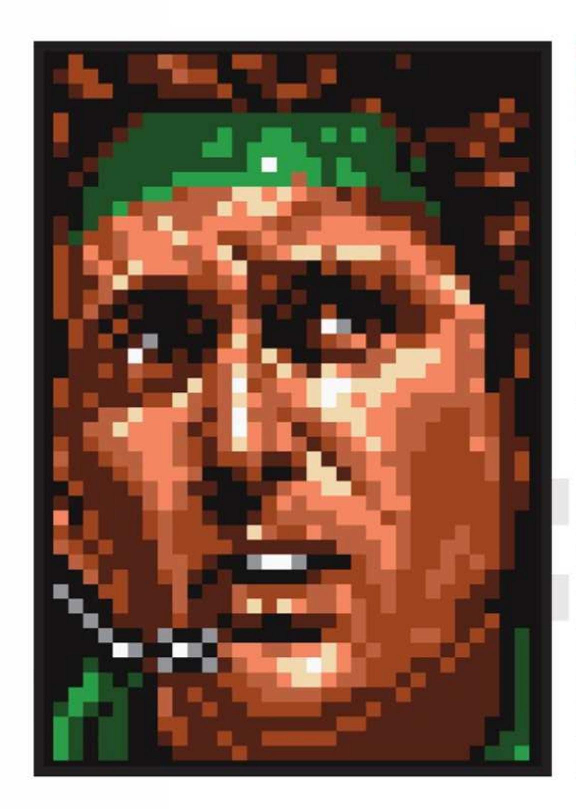
■ The series featured many appearances of the awesome Hind D helicopter boss. Stinger missiles are go.



■ Another nod to the influence of Hollywood movies in *Metal Gear*, the title's boss resembles *Robocop 2's* ED-209.

HALL OF FAME... METAL GEAR THE RIP-OFFS

BACK IN THE early days of videogame production, trivial matters like 'intellectual property' and 'copyright' didn't seem so important to game designers. So when movie buff Hideo Kojima came to create the world of *Metal Gear*, it was inevitable that he would base his characters on cult figures from his favourite films. Here are a few of the most obvious lookalikes...



SOLID SNAKE

THE MAN THAT needs no introduction, Solid Snake's imagery for the original *Metal Gear* was based on Michael Biehn's Kyle Reese in *Terminator*, to the extent that the cover art for *Metal Gear* shows him standing in the exact same position as Reese in a *Terminator* scene. Snake was described as a 'martial arts expert' in *Snake's Revenge*, where he appears very muscular, somewhat like any number of Arnold Schwarzenegger characters, but most notably Dutch in *Predator*. In *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, he looks remarkably like Mel Gibson.

BIG BOSS

CONSIDERED BY MANY to be the 20th Century's finest soldier, Big Boss is the 'father' of... well, most things: FOXHOUND, Outer Heaven, Zanzibar Land, even Snake, thanks to project Les Enfants Terribles (another movie reference for those counting). He shares both his underlying character, story and image with Sean Connery's Marko Ramius in *The Hunt For Red October*.



ROY CAMPBELL



ROY CAMPBELL WAS the executive officer and *Solid Snake*'s superior during Operation: Intrude F014. He is also one of Snake's best friends. Roy Campbell was based on Richard Crenna's Samuel Trautman from the *Rambo* movies.

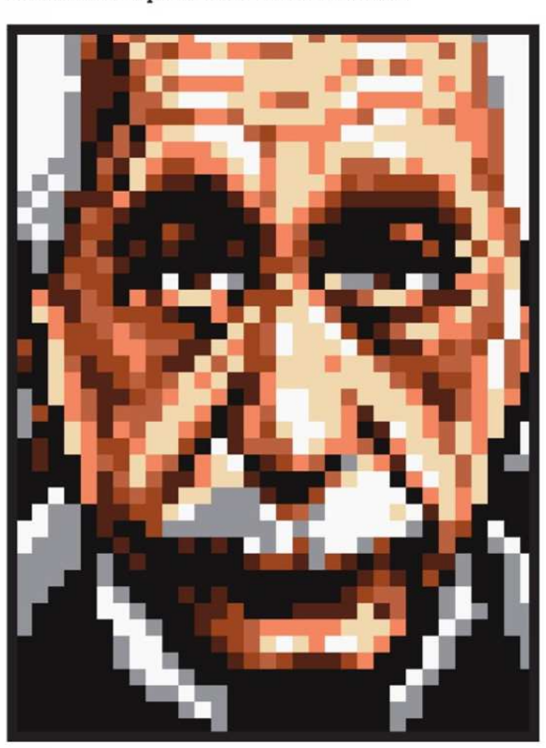


HOLLY WHITE

AMERICAN FREELANCE JOURNALIST Holly White won a Pulitzer Prize for her report on Afghanistan, and a Grammy for documentary *Unknown Bloodstream*. She is also beautiful, having worked as a model for *Depeche Vogue* magazine. The attractive, well-informed journalist character is seen in thousands of movies (April O'Neil from *Turtles* among legions of others) and her image is somewhat akin to the time's screen queen Christina Applegate.

DR DRAGO PETTROVICH MADNAR

FAMILIAR TO ALL as a good scientist turned mad, Dr Drago Pettrovich Madnar created the Metal Gear TX-55 prototype. Despite being captured, along with his daughter, in *Metal Gear*, Madnar returned voluntarily to Outer Heaven to oversee the development of Metal Gear D. His image is so iconic it needs no explanation… he's Einstein.



YOZEF NORDEN

YOZEF NORDEN (RENAMED Johan Jacobsen in the mobile phone/PS2 versions) is a zoologist and authority on endangered species. He was near Zanzibar Land at the time of Operation: Intrude F014 and helped Snake to deal with animals. His appearance is similar to Danny DeVito.



GEORGE KASLER



A MEMBER OF FOXHOUND during Operation: Intrude F014, Kasler is a mercenary with intel on everyone. FOXHOUND hired him as an arms advisor during the Zanzibar Land conflict and told Solid Snake about Gray Fox during their showdown at the end of *Metal Gear: Solid Snake*. He resembles Dolph Lundgren.

NATASHA MARCOVA



NATASHA MARCOVA (SUBSEQUENTLY Gustava Heffner) was a member of the Czech State Police, responsible for the protection of Dr Kio Marv during the Zanzibar Land incident. Their plane was hijacked by Zanzibar Land soldiers, but she managed to escape, disguised as a Zanzibar soldier. Her former lover, Gray Fox, killed her with a missile while she was with *Solid Snake*. Her relationship with Gray Fox echoes that of a relationship in the JC Pollock novel *Crossfire*. Natasha also resembles Forties screen siren Gloria Grahame.



GRAY FOX

FOXHOUND AGENT FRANK Jaeger was the only agent to achieve the FOX codename, FOXHOUND's top commemoration. Gray Fox was Solid Snake's close friend after Operation: Intrude N313, but loyalty to his father, Big Boss, saw them conflict at the end of *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. His character and design are reflected in Tom Berenger's Sgt Bob Barnes in *Platoon*. Gray Fox shares his first name with *Crossfire*'s protagonist Frank Kessler.

MINORITY REPORT

Among the millions of popular second-hand consoles lie some true collectors' treasures – machines so rare you may not have heard of them

YOU MUST have heard of those collectors who try to acquire every official release for the console of their choice. Personally, we think they're a little crazy. Why waste all that time and money trying to get every single Dreamcast game, for example, when many of them aren't even worth playing? We'll never understand it.

There are some game machines, however, that make the 'complete collection' both a realistic goal and something worth doing. These are the machines that lived such short lifespans that only a handful of games were ever released for them. And because they were so short-lived they're usually quite intriguing machines that did something different from the mainstream and are therefore of historical interest too.

With that in mind, read on as we detail some of the more noteworthy consoles and computers that fall into this category. None of the machines listed here were ever granted more than 30 commercial games, making them a viable option for collectors and a fascinating talking point. Many are quite difficult to track down these days, but that's all part of the fun, isn't it?




















CASIO LOOPY

Year of Production: 1995
Number of games released: 11
Expect to pay: £25

LONG BEFORE Nintendo restyled itself as every young girl and grandma's favourite purveyor of videogames, Casio tried the same thing, albeit with a much more cynical approach. Aimed at the female end of the market, the Casio Loopy hosted a small number of games, which fell mostly into the bracket of dating sims, dress-up games, and painting software. In addition, a number of interesting accessories were released, including a built-in printer and capture-card that allowed you to make stickers using images from a VCR or TV set.

Rather short-sightedly, the Loopy only featured one controller port, which must have seriously diminished its appeal, especially considering the intended audience.

STANDOUT TITLES:







■ WanWan Aijou Monogatari ■ Anime Land

































PANASONIC M2

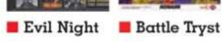
Year of Production: 1997
Number of games released: 0
Expect to pay: Too Much

STANDOUT TITLES:









■ Polystars ■ Evil Night ■ Battle Tryst

IF THERE'S one console that wins the prize for the least number of games ever released then Panasonic's M2 is the undisputed winner – although it's probably cheating to include it, as this follow-up to the 3DO was never officially released.

Finished to a near final state, several prototypes of the M2 were produced in Japan and America and have leaked out into the public domain. Though no games are known to exist, there is a possibility that some unfinished betas are out there, especially as Warp's Dreamcast title *D2* was originally designed for the M2.

Although the console never saw a retail release, the finished hardware has been used throughout the industry. Many hardware units made it into Japanese vending machines and ATMs, while the console's relatively high power also earned it a place in some kitchen showrooms, running kitchen design software. In addition, the hardware was used in a small number of Konami arcade titles – the only games to ever really benefit from the power of the semi-legendary game console.

Curiously, the hardware shot we're featuring was provided by Stephen Flynn who was lucky enough to find the prototype at a flea market in North Carolina. He has not yet revealed exactly how much he paid for the console.









JAGUAR CD

Year of Production: 1995
Number of games released: 13
Expect to pay: £70

STANDOUT TITLES:



■ Myst



■ Gorf



■ Space Ace

AN ILL-FATED add-on for an ill-fated console, Jaguar CD never really had a chance. Atari promised this expansion as soon as the Jaguar was launched, but it took three years to get the project off the ground and by that time the final Atari console was all but dead. Only a handful of games were ever officially released, though the CD format has ensured that both homebrew and semi-retail games have continued to be produced to this day.

The CD unit came bundled with two games, *Blue Lightning* and *Vid Grid*, as well as the soundtrack to *Tempest 2000*, so expect to pick these up more easily than any other Jag CD release.

Despite looking like a toilet seat, the Jaguar CD is perhaps best known for the Virtual Light Machine that was built into the unit. This software, written by Jeff Minter, was designed to display hypnotic imagery in time to CD music – much like the software he programmed for 360 ten years later.







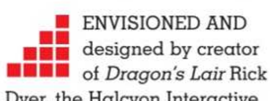






HALCYON

Year of Production: 1985
Number of games released: 2
Expect to pay: around £1,000



ENVISIONED AND designed by creator of *Dragon's Lair* Rick Dyer, the Halcyon Interactive Laser Disc System was intended to allow laser disc games to be played at home. Such titles were all the rage in the arcades of the early-Eighties, and a console powerful enough to play them at home was considered the Holy Grail of videogames.

The powerful console could handle the complex requirements of FMV games, it also had advanced features like speech synthesis and voice recognition, it was way ahead of its time.

The $2,500 price tag prevented the machine from succeeding and only two – admittedly excellent – games were ever released before the Halcyon disappeared for good. The tragedy is that it would be decades before an arcade-perfect *Dragon's Lair* could be played at home.



NEC SUPERGRAFX

Year of Production: 1989
Number of games released: 7
Expect to pay: around £60

STANDOUT TITLES:















■ Ghouls & Ghosts ■ Aldynes ■ 1941 Counter Attack



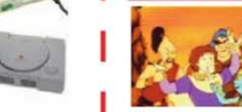
ALTHOUGH ORIGINALLY designed to be a 16-bit console named PC-Engine 2, NEC's SuperGrafX was, for reasons unknown, rushed to completion and released early as an enhanced version of the 8-bit PC-Engine. Enhancements over the basic PC-Engine included four times the amount of RAM, an extra video chip, and the ability to display two independently scrolling backgrounds at once, making the console favourably comparable to Mega Drive.

Sadly, the console was not well supported by developers and only a handful of titles were ever produced. The machine has proved popular with collectors, however, as it is fully backward compatible with PC-Engine's 700+ games, and the seven SuperGrafX titles are all quite good.

Collectors should also be aware that a flight yoke accessory by the name of Power Console was produced to prototype stage but never officially manufactured. Anyone lucky enough to locate those prototypes potentially stands to make quite a bit of money.

STANDOUT TITLES:

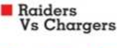








■ Thayer's Quest ■ Raiders Vs Chargers









MAGNAVOX ODYSSEY

Year of Production: 1972
Number of games released: 28
Expect to pay: £10

THOUGH RELATIVELY unheard of, Odyssey was the world's first programmable console, designed by Ralph Baer in 1968.

The Odyssey's games came on removable circuit cards, similar to cartridges but without any on-board components. Instead, the cards used different organisations of jumpers and signal generators to command the console to run a desired type of gameplay. Due to the basic technology of these cards, graphical presentation and gameplay logic were incredibly primitive. The workaround for this involved plastic overlays that added much-needed graphical detail, while many of the games also came with a set of dice and counters, which were especially useful for running multiplayer games.

With such 'extras', Magnavox Odyssey can barely be considered a digital games console in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, it remains an important piece of gaming history and a fun machine to collect for. Although locating all the games with their paraphernalia intact can be quite a challenge, the hardware itself is quite inexpensive.

STANDOUT TITLES:

■ Wipeout

■ Invasion

■ Interplanetary Voyage



MSX TURBO R

Year of Production: 1990
Number of games released: 30
Expect to pay: £30

STANDOUT TITLES:



■ Illusion City



■ Fray



■ Princess Maker

THE LAST of the MSX line of Japanese micros, the Turbo R was a super-powerful version of the machine, designed with multimedia capabilities as a priority. Although capable of much more than most comparable systems, the Turbo R failed in the face of aggressive competition from both the IBM PC and Amiga. Whereas up to a hundred manufacturers had produced their own version of the MSX1, only Panasonic bothered this time around.

To say that only 30 games were produced is an exaggeration as six of them were really just MSX2 games that looked marginally better when played on a Turbo R. There are also some great homebrew games, particularly *F-Nano 2*, a technically ambitious *F-Zero* clone.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F

Year of Production: 1976
Number of games released: 26
Expect to pay: £10



STANDOUT TITLES:



■ Galactic Space War



■ Hangman



■ Robot War & Torpedo Alley

ONE OF the earliest American game consoles, the Fairchild Channel F was, at one point, a serious contender to the Atari 2600. However, a lack of recognisable arcade conversions prevented the machine from ever breaking the mass-market. The 26 available cartridges usually included more than one game inside, most of which were very simple in nature. Board games, card games, and sports were prevalent, though a number of basic shoot-'em-ups were also available.

The controllers are arguably the most interesting part of the Channel F's design. Functioning as both joysticks and paddles, they could handle most game types of the day without the need to use an extra accessory. They effectively featured two separate fire buttons too, as the paddle at the top could be either pushed in or pulled up.



GIZMONDO

Year of Production: 2005
Number of games released: 14
Expect to pay: £30

STANDOUT TITLES:




■ Sticky Balls ■ Trailblazer

GIZMONDO IS the most recent example of a console casualty. It was too expensive, massively underpowered, and featured few quality titles. When the Gizmondo company was dissolved, however, retailers slashed the hardware price, and the handheld became a curious collector's piece. The remaining units were snapped up from the retailers who bothered to stock it in the first place and collectors began scouring the net for a complete set of games.

As with most machines featured here, many of the proposed games were never finished or released, but as a product of the digital age, many leaked onto the internet. If you know where to look and how to make them work, there are a few decent titles hidden away. Of the titles that made it to shelves, only the two titles to the left (particularly the conversion of the Pickford Brothers' *Sticky Balls)* are worth owning.































NINTENDO HAS had very few hardware failures over the years, mostly because it prototypes all its concepts to the nth degree, only releasing them when they're truly ready. The story was different with the Virtual Boy, however. Nobody quite knows why, but Nintendo rushed the machine to market, in a reportedly unfinished state – much to the protest of its creator, the late Gunpei Yokoi.

Seen as a cash-in on the virtual-reality craze, the VB failed to actually be anything like the machine many were expecting. The graphics were a horrible red monochrome, using an unsophisticated wireframe display. Its biggest problem, aside from a lack of games, was that it caused headaches in almost anyone who dared to play it. The machine was understandably dead within a year.

VIRTUAL BOY

Year of Production: 1995
Number of games released: 22
Expect to pay: £75

STANDOUT TITLES:






■ Mario Clash ■ Vertical Force ■ Mario Tennis


























NUON

Year of Production: 2000
Number of games released: 8
Expect to pay: £100

MORE OF a concept than a console, the Nuon was a hardware standard designed to be integrated into ordinary DVD players. The idea was that anyone buying a DVD player would also find themselves with a machine capable of playing games and would go out and buy the software as a consequence.

The problem with this strategy is that most people preferred to do the opposite: buy a game machine that was also a DVD player. In other words, they wanted a PS2. As such, only a minute number of DVD manufacturers opted to licence the Nuon technology and the idea died.

Thanks to Jeff Minter, the Nuon did receive one decent game: *Tempest 3000*, which remains collectable to this day. Rather oddly, the machine also garnered limited support from developers in both Japan and Korea, which is quite unusual for an obscure American console.

STANDOUT TITLES:






■ Tempest 3000 ■ Iron Soldier 3 ■ Ballistic







TIGER GAME.COM

Year of Production: 1997
Number of games released: 20
Expect to pay: £15

STANDOUT TITLES:


Duke Nukem 3D


Fighters Megamix


Resident Evil 2

TIGER'S GAME.COM (pronounced without the 'dot') launched in 1997 with some groundbreaking features. It was the first handheld to feature a touch screen, the first to integrate PDA software, and the first to allow two cartridges to be inserted at once. Unfortunately, however, the handheld was also hampered by a terrible monochrome screen that looked very outdated next to the Game Boy Color, which was released the following year.

The games themselves also did Game.Com no favours. Although Tiger secured some high-profile titles, few bore any resemblance to their console or PC counterparts and played very poorly as a consequence. A version of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* was in development at one point, and though some semi-impressive screenshots were shown, the game was never completed.



VECTREX

Year of Production: 1982
Number of games released: 22
Expect to pay: £50

VECTREX WAS an unusual console, initially envisioned as a home version of the popular vector graphics arcade machines of the time. The in-built monitor displayed graphics only in the vector style, which meant that the games all featured a semi-three-dimensional look that made them much more visually attractive than other console and computer games of the time. And although it failed to gain any of the arcade licences that made the Atari 2600 so popular, its 'clones' had more in common with the original coin-ops.

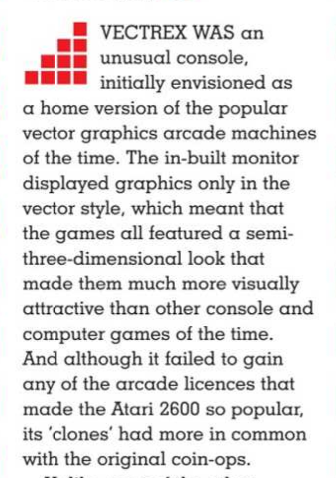
Unlike most of the other games machines featured in this article, Vectrex deserved to do much better than it did. The hardware was stunning and the games played wonderfully. Sadly, the console was just hitting its stride when the videogame crash of 1983 happened. Vectrex was caught in the fallout and never recovered. The greatest tragedy of all this is that the Vectrex Colour, which was being prototyped at the time, never made it onto shelves.

STANDOUT TITLES:


Armor Attack


Clean Sweep


Fortress Of Narzod





NINTENDO 64DD

Year of Production: 1999
Number of games released: 9
Expect to pay: £100

STANDOUT TITLES:

Mario Artist

F-Zero X

SimCity 64

DURING THE console war of the mid-Nineties, Nintendo was struggling to secure third-party support because of the high cost of manufacturing N64 cartridges. Its solution was to produce a disk drive that would be significantly cheaper to work with. Nintendo being Nintendo, however, these new disks used a proprietary media and were still more expensive than CD-ROMs. And by the time the drive was actually released, N64 was on its last legs, PlayStation had a firm grip on the market, and Dreamcast had even been released in Japan. It was simply too little, too late.

Many of Nintendo's proposed 64DD games were either shifted to cartridge or cancelled altogether. Of the nine that did make it, four were variations on the *Mario Artist* series and two were *Doshin The Giant* games. The only worthwhile reason to buy a DD drive now is the *F-Zero X* expansion kit, a brilliant disk that allowed users to create their own levels for the cartridge version of *F-Zero X*.





CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing arcade ports under the spotlight



SYSTEM FAILURE

Format: Atari 2600
Year: 1982
Publisher: Coleco
Developer: In-House

Zaxxon

THE HYPE



IN JUST FOUR short years arcade shooters went from the 2D monochrome minimalism of *Space Invaders* to this, a multicolour scrolling extravaganza with never before seen isometric visuals. Simulating a pseudo-3D effect, Sega's *Zaxxon* allowed you to move your ship in unprecedented new directions like 'up' and 'down' as well as the more traditional 'left' and 'right'. And in the formative years of arcade gaming it must have seemed like the future of shoot-'em-ups. Naturally, the home conversion was highly anticipated. But how could the consoles of the day, which struggled just to make *Donkey Kong* look like an ape, manage to come close to replicating Sega's incredible new blaster? Most of them couldn't, of course. But that wouldn't stop them trying to cash in on the latest big thing.

THE WARNING SIGNS

Coleco boxes usually feature a single screenshot of the game, but this one has an illustration instead. Is it an accurate representation of the port?

The box says that the game is "by Sega", but the small print says otherwise. Always read the small print…



It says 'three-dimensional' so the illustration can't be misleading, can it? Well, Coleco has lied to us before, so yes, it definitely could be.

Box images provided by www.atariage.com



THE REALITY

■ THE ATARI 2600 was never going to be able to do *Zaxxon* properly. So the most sensible thing that Coleco could have done would be to make the game for more capable systems and leave the VCS well alone. Except, of course, that the console had the biggest install base, and Coleco was greedy and went and did it anyway. The resulting game bears as much resemblance to the original as a doner kebab does to whichever poor animal happens to constitute its meat, and has even fewer redeeming features. We wouldn't mind if it still played well, but it's a bit of a mess. It comes across as a poor man's *River Raid*, only with the unfortunate fact that the terrible attempt at three-dimensional visuals forces you to repeatedly crash into the walls and even the floor because there's no believable perspective whatsoever.

1 The first thing you'll notice about *Zaxxon* is that it's not isometric. Instead it tries to simulate a 3D feel by using 2D backgrounds that increase in size as they come closer to the screen. It's a nice try, but it doesn't work. In fact, it's rubbish.

2 The original had a height meter to show how far you were from the ground. More often than not you didn't need to use it because the game did a good job of displaying height. But on 2600 it's essential if you don't want to crash into a wall.

3 The orange bits are supposed to represent walls and you're meant to fly over the top of them to avoid crashing. The thing is, they don't appear to exist in a different space to the blue floor, so you will *always* crash into them on your first go.

What You Should Have Played It On



■ Remember when Coleco made the Atari version of *Donkey Kong* shamefully bad but made its own Colecovision version the best available? Looks like it did it again with *Zaxxon*. And they say lightning never strikes twice.





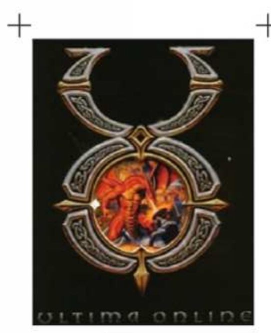


BEHIND THE SCENES

ULTIMA ONLINE

Pickpocketing, murder, exploitation, inflation, famine, overpopulation: Origin Systems' Ultima Online had it all and way ahead of its time. games™ travels to the uncharted MMO landscape of 1997 and explores its greatest pioneer






Released: 1997
Format: PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Origin Systems

KEY STAFF:
Richard Garriott
Producer
Starr Long
Director
Raph Koster
Lead Designer
Rick Delashmit
Lead Programmer

LORD BRITISH was supposed to be invulnerable. In the world of Ultima, he's the most persistent, powerful, and vital character – and the most obvious fictionalisation of the series' creator Richard Garriott. His school chums called him 'Lord British' for his ancestry and accent – which, considering his Texan twang, is utterly absurd.

There were ways to fell the in-game Lord British in single-player, but those story permutations were never considered canonical. In *Ultima Online*, however, there was no canon – or perhaps everything was. As the first mainstream MMO it was an experimental and lawless frontier, so it was vital that players couldn't screw around with the fundamentals of the *Ultima* mythos. Sadly, during a beta test on 8 August 1997, Garriott forgot to turn his invulnerability flag on, and a player named Rainz found a way to take him down.

Rainz blasted British with a fire field, and the spell was so potent that the Lord perished. The lag resulting from the stress test on the server, coupled with the fact that the city guards had been given the day off, meant that Garriott was unable to retaliate and Rainz escaped without pursuit from Britannia's finest. He was banned soon after – not for killing British, according to Origin, but for his numerous bug exploits and constant griefing. To some, Rainz became a martyr; he represented an *Ultima Online* (and thus an era in MMO history) that afforded complete freedom. Players stacked chairs to reach ledges, ambushed travellers in the woods, built functioning towns on unclaimed land, and hunted entire species to extinction. In practical terms, it was a nightmare, but as a world there have been few others like it.

Reportedly conceived long before development began by both Garriott and Origin producer Starr Long, *Ultima Online* was intended as the first 'proper' realisation of the online world concept ventured in text- and graphics-based Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), which had been around since the late-Seventies. "Of course," Garriott laughs when CONTINUED >.



Developer-run in-game events were very popular with players.



WE HAD THIS IDEA OF 'IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME'. AND 50,000 PEOPLE SIGNED UP







Ultima Online's detailed world afforded plenty of secret locations and treasures.









Mazes are much more fun when you see in isometric.







Posted by: BOB SYKO

I don't know anything about the game other than I was just a boy when it was released and apparently it's designed by some mad head who calls himself Lord British?

Posted by: MIKEHAGGAR

All I can remember is watching a review on the television, which featured footage of somebody who tried to connect to the servers, but it timed out all the time.

Posted by: FATBOYSLICK

I seem to remember that one of my friends used to play it *all the time* and it just seemed like he was doing the same thing over and over – going into dungeons where loads of monsters attacked him. I also remember saying that it would never catch on.

Posted by: DANTE76

This was reason why I persuaded my parents to get the internet. It was great to begin with, but after a few years, the Isle of the Avatar was full of pimps and fanboys. Paved the way for the MMO though.

Posted by: JAMES

I remember that the assassination of Lord British was the videogame equivalent of the JFK shooting and at that point I realised how important gaming had become in my life.

Posted by: SOMERSET BUMPKIN

Ultima Underworld was the first PC game I ever completed. That game was cool. I realise that's not *Ultima Online*, but I wanted to contribute.

discussing the pitch to EA, "the largest-selling online game at the time only had 15,000 subscribers, which didn't justify a lot of funding. There were a number of graphical MUDs, none of which were particularly profitable, so the fiscal projections for *UO* were probably twice as big as the biggest-selling MUD at the time – so, like, 30,000 subscribers. Which wasn't nearly enough."

EA wasn't prepared to shell out for a full game, but after much haggling, Garriott persuaded them to hand over $250,000 for Origin to make a prototype. The five-year-old *Ultima VI* engine looked rather crude at this point, but the potential was obvious. Garriott recalls that they put a message out on their website saying: "'Hey, guys, we're making this online *Ultima*, and if you want to try it out, please send us $5 so we can send you a CD'. We just had this idea of 'If you build it, they will come'. And 50,000 people signed up. You do the maths – that's the $250,000." *Ultima Online* went from being an outlandish vanity project to EA's top priority. "After that," Garriott crows, "the purse strings opened up."

The extra funding allowed Origin to recruit more staff, including Raph Koster. He joined Origin in 1995 along with his wife, Kristen, and became *Ultima Online*'s lead designer. He recalls how he got the job: "We'd made friends with people on MUDs, and one of them was a fellow named Rick Delashmit. My wife and I were living in Alabama, and he applied for a job in the game industry in Austin. He ended up at this shareware company called Morassware. They had a pretty serious way of interviewing: they asked a whole bunch of programmers to come in, and on a Friday they'd say 'Come back in two weeks from now with a good computer port of a board game and we'll hire the best one'. So he did a port of a board game I made, and got the job. When Morassware was approached by Origin to do contract work, Rick found he shared an interest in online games with Starr Long, and when Starr asked Rick to recommend designers, he mentioned my wife and me."

With his MUD experience, Koster proved the perfect leader. Looking back he thinks that *Ultima Online* became unique because of the diverse mix of development backgrounds on the team. "We had folks who came from a single-player background, but most of the team was recruited from the MUD community," he says. "We had people from the DikuMUDs – which inspired *EverQuest* – and people from the MOO [MUD Object Oriented] worlds, so we had a team made up of a lot of different backgrounds in terms of code bases and architecture. All of that went into the mix. The idea of *Ultima Online* had been circulating for years at Origin, but there hadn't been many people with the right backgrounds. So the influence of MUDs on the team was really dramatic."



The moment Lord British was defeated during the beta, as captured by 'the internet'.

IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR US TO KEEP THINGS FROM SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL

Garriott's main desire was to please his *Ultima* fan base: "People would play the games and wish they could bring friends with them. With *Ultima Online* you could." Of course, while *Ultima Online* achieved this goal to some extent, in many ways it was totally alien. Gone was the notion of a hero – enter the avatar. Britannia became a place to live and work – not necessarily save. Stripped of their relevance to the plot, players were reduced to the realtive nobodies they were in real life. And they loved it.

In the early days, Garriott found that he had the most success with the simpler mechanics. Fishing, for instance. "We had fishing rods," he recalls, "and one of my rules about *Ultima* games is that if you have something in the world, you must be able to do something with it. So for the rods, we put in this little fishing simulation. If you tried to catch a fish, there was a 50/50 chance you would. End of simulation. It was a simple idea, but people loved it. I'd go down and see players sitting around fishing. So we refined it and it became a trade."

Pivotally, those trades were available to any player, at any time. Rather than adopting the rigid class-

WHAT THEY SAID...



A game that requires a credit card and internet access before the player can get even a glimpse of what's going on had better be incredibly engrossing or at least immediately accessible. Ultima Online is neither. The 'undoubted future of interactive entertainment'? God forbid.

Computer Games Magazine, Sept 1997

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



The first graphical MUD, AOL's *Neverwinter Nights* was very popular for its time and no doubt paved the way for the MMO genre itself.



Verant Interactive's *EverQuest* came to a market already warmed up by *Ultima Online*'s success, and even implemented many of its competitor's ideas.







■ *Ultima Online*'s Britannia was realised with the exquisite levels of detail for which *Ultima* games are known.

based advancement systems seen in MMOs today, *UO* allowed players to develop skills in any category they liked, effectively creating their own character classes. Skills weren't chosen off advancement trees once sufficient experience points had been accrued. In a logical twist, in the online world you got better at swords by swinging them around.

UO's world was similarly dynamic. Throughout his career, Garriott strove to create a living, breathing world for his players to explore. With *UO*, he was able to take this principle to its zenith. He wanted the world, rather than being the sort of static 'monster farm' you see in the MMOs of today, to be self-reliant and ever-changing. His favourite example of this is *UO*'s once-robust wildlife simulation, where animals would breed at certain rates, hunt for food, and scavenge if none was available. "So, let's say you had some wolves," he explains. "And the wolves preyed upon deer. Well, if the wolves killed too many deer, then they'd be forced to go into town looking for food, and players would be given dynamic quests to go kill the wolves. So it was supposed to balance out." It didn't, unfortunately.



RAPH KOSTER
Lead Designer

Shortly after players began to swarm the *UO* servers – or 'Shards' as they were known – they completely overloaded the nature simulation, cleansing the wolf and deer populations. The system was scrapped in favour of a more static, less realistic one. This is emblematic of a lot of *UO*'s growing pains: the world was perfect, sensible, and alive, but it was impractical. The moment real people descended upon it with their conflicting desires and ambitions, it was all but destroyed. Origin entrusted to players more freedom than your modern Western MMO player could imagine: player-killing, pickpocketing, and real-estate development within the persistent game world were all permitted in the spirit of providing a liveable universe. It seemed understandable to have such dangers and benefits in a fantasy setting, but it all went horribly wrong: in-game crime, overdevelopment, and economic struggles became so prevalent that *Ultima Online*, far from being the ultimate Britannia simulation, became Manchester with dragons.

UO was patched up through expansions and revisions, and retained its original appeal, but it still makes Koster wistful. "I think we did a lot of things right – some of which we didn't even know we were doing right at the time. I think we reached for some things we didn't quite grasp, and we gave up on iterating some things before they made it. So it was a game where the level of freedom we gave users was so high that when they really ran with the ball, it was very difficult for us to keep things from spinning out of control. And often our reaction was to take freedom away rather than find a compromise. I mean, things like the PvP, obviously, but even simpler things like dropping stuff on the ground, or being able to set something on top of something else. Players did amazing stuff with that, but they also found ways to abuse the system. So we had to take away the feature because we couldn't find a way to ensure people play nicely."

The MMOs that followed took this lesson to heart, and never again has such a large property attempted something so anarchic. Still, despite its impracticalities, *Ultima Online* remains a fascinating game. Its influence on the industry is immeasurable, and there are innovations in it that other MMO luminaries have yet to recognise. It's the Rainzes of the world who are behind this sad state of affairs. Oddly enough, though, they're also the very reason *Ultima Online* was so different and so real.

ENDLESS APPEAL

ULTIMA ONLINE IS the longest consistently running MMO of all time. Even though Origin all but disbanded in 2000 (officially ceasing to exist in 2004), EA has continued to support the game and has attempted to reinvigorate its user base with a regular stream of expansion packs. In order to maintain its appeal to modern consumers, EA has revised the game client twice. The most recent revision, *Kingdom Reborn*, arrived in 2007, bringing it to parity with most of its competitors from an isometric visual standpoint. Time will tell whether *UO*'s unique charm continues to keep loyalists on side, but there's little reason not to jump in now and play the 14-day trial, available from www.uoherald.com.



■ *Only Pirates Of The Burning Sea* has trumped *Ultima Online* in sea travel.

Hall Of Fame…
Ryu

Capcom's Street Fighter franchise brought personality to a genre, and, arguably, at the heart of that genre was a character. His name was Ryu

"SWIFT AS THE wind, silent as a forest, fierce as fire and immovable as a mountain", so reads the Fuuikazan (the motto of Japanese warlord Takeda Shingen) often drawn on Ryu's belt. After appearing in over 30 games, Ryu has more than proved his immovability. His perfect combination of moves, Shoryuken (Dragon Punch), Hadouken (Fireball) and Tatsumaki Senpuukyaku (Hurricane Kick) are a bible to all 2D fighting games. Ryu clones permeate the entire 2D beat-'em-up market to such an extent that finding a single fighting game without some form of dragon punch or fireball is virtually impossible. Ryu has long been a gaming icon and now, with the announcement of *Street Fighter IV*, he seems set to continue his dominance past the 20-year mark well into the future.

Prior to the release of *Street Fighter II* in 1991, beat-'em-ups had failed to find their feet. Games like *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* and *Karate Champ* had found popularity but not reached the genre's potential. Using its newly developed CPS-1 arcade board and six-button cabinet, Capcom unveiled *Street Fighter II*, and the entire genre was turned upside down. Suddenly, there were eight playable characters, instead of just one, plus a stable of moves for each. Not only did this increase gameplay but it also gave rise to personality in the genre, as gamers could choose their favourite character and fighting style. Favouritism led to fandom and finally to a kind of personal heroism. Every character had their fan base but it was Ryu that would capture the heart of the genre.

Very much the 'wandering warrior' archetype, Ryu battles not so much for victory as for the fight itself and for the spiritual journey, a personality that is reflected in his appearance – he wears nothing more than his traditional Gi (karate outfit), black belt and headband. An orphaned child, Ryu was adopted and trained in the Nin-Ansatsuken martial art by Gouken, who also introduced Ryu to his sparring partner and surrogate brother, Ken. At age 23 Ryu set off to enter the first World Warrior tournament, encountering Sagat and permanently scarring him with a lethal Metsu Shoryuken attack.

The original *Street Fighter* story is purportedly based on the real-life events of Yoshiji Soeno. Soeno, a karate legend, embarked on a solo mission to Thailand (Sagat's home) to face the masters of Muay Thai. Arriving in Bangkok, Soeno's abilities were doubted and he was told by the Rachadamnern Stadium to make a name for himself in Northern Thailand before returning to Bangkok to fight. Soeno did so, earning the attention of Muay Thai master Reiba, 'Dark Lord of Muay Thai'. After defeating Reiba's disciple, Mongkut Kalop, the 'Dark Warrior', Soeno was ready to face the 'Dark Lord of Muay Thai' himself. The similarities are obvious and further evidence can be seen in the Japanese martial-arts comic *Karate Baka Ichidai* (The Karate Idiot), in which Soeno and Reiba are drawn in a near-identical manner to Ryu and Sagat. This reference to real life continues into *Street Fighter II*; in 1975, a year after Soeno's trip to Thailand, the first World Open was held, pitting fighters of different styles against each other.

WHILE RYU'S CHARACTER was changed to that of a con artist, caught up in Guile's war against Shadaloo, for the *Street Fighter* movie, this had very little relevance to his character in the gaming world, leaving his true development to the release of *Street Fighter Alpha* in 1995.

On returning home in the *Alpha* series, Ryu finds Gouken murdered at the hands of Akuma. Ryu vows to avenge Gouken and sets off to hunt for Akuma, finally encountering him on Gokuentou Island, where he learns of the dark power, Satsui no Hadou, inside him, a power that will drive Ryu to kill his opponents. It is this battle within Ryu, the archetypal good versus evil and inner temptation, that has fuelled his character ever since. Originally introduced in Masahiko Nakahira's manga, *Street Fighter Zero*, Evil Ryu was first introduced into Capcom's canon in *Street Fighter Alpha 2*. As with Akuma, Evil Ryu's character is summed up with the signature symbol on his back; in *Alpha 3*, the symbol is Satsu (meaning 'murder'), in *Capcom Vs SNK 2* it is Metsu (meaning 'destruction'). Evil Ryu, however, has never been a character in his own right, serving instead as a 'what might have been'.

As with almost all games of *Street Fighter*'s fame, the story has made its way into multiple other media. The height of *Street Fighter*'s success has chiselled Ryu's name into the annals of the gaming industry and pop culture in general. Ryu leapt to fighting supremacy two decades ago with a now gospel-like move set, and not once has he been dethroned – he is a true gaming champion.

>. MAGIC MOMENTS



■ The release of *Street Fighter* in 1987 sees the birth of the most important beat-'em-up series in history.



■ What do we need to say? It's *Street Fighter II*. Taker of a thousand coins, bringer of a thousand clones.



■ The *Alpha* series saw Ryu's first true character development, with the introduction of Evil Ryu.



■ Take the greatest fighter ever, add a pinch of superheroes and some stupidly over-the-top specials et voilà… awesome fun.

FACE

Ryu bares an uncanny resemblance to martial-art comic *Karate Baka Ichida*'s Soeno, believed to be the original influence for the now legendary character. Ryu's features changed significantly in *Street Fighter III*, with black hair, brown eyes and much more facial stubble.

HAIRBAND

Ryu has worn several hairbands throughout the years. In the original *Street Fighter*, he sported a white headband, which was switched to red for *Street Fighter II*. After beating Ryu in the *Alpha* series, Ken gives Ryu his red hairband to remind him to stay focused and to remember their battle.

NAME

The name Ryu can be translated as meaning 'Dragon', hence 'Dragon Punch'. It is a common name used throughout other Japanese videogames such as *Shenmue* and *Ninja Gaiden* but *Street Fighter* was arguably the first game to use it and remains the most iconic.

GI (OUTFIT)

Training and fighting is Ryu's life, so he is very rarely seen without his Gi – a traditional karate outfit. The Gi would be tattered and torn, from overuse, by the time of *Street Fighter III*.

FEET

In the original *Street Fighter*, Ryu wore red slippers, yet in both *Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter III*, he prefers to fight barefoot. Perhaps his vagabond lifestyle has left him unable to afford new shoes. Or maybe he's just that hard.

BELT

The black belt is, of course, the symbol of a martial-arts master. In some official artwork, the Fuuikazan is written on Ryu's belt. Translated it reads: "Swift as the wind, silent as a forest, fierce as fire and immovable as a mountain." The Kanji (Japanese script) is taken from Tzu's Art of War, a code for battle conduct.



■ Ryu and Ken were the only World Warriors lucky enough to receive the glorious CPS-3 makeover.



■ SNK took the reins for *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos* and redrew Ryu in its own unique, harder-edged style.



■ Updated for the widescreen generation, Ryu gets a smooth, high-definition makeover in 2008.



■ Ryu and Ken will return in *Street Fighter IV*, tougher and meaner than ever. But will they be 2D or 3D?

Hall Of Fame… RYU THE WORLD WARRIORS



APPEARANCE: Near-identical to Ryu, his red Gi has the arms ripped off and his hair nods towards his free-spirit lifestyle.

"Attack me if you dare, I will crush you"

Hadouken

↓ ↘ → Ⓟ



APPEARANCE: It's more than obvious which boxer Balrog's Japanese name, M.Bison, refers to. Add to that the cornrow hairstyle, narrow eyes and huge arms and you've got yourself the self-proclaimed "baddest man on the planet".

"Get up, you wimp"

Straight Dash Punch

← → + Ⓟ







APPEARANCE: T. Hawk's entire design, from his feathered hair and face-paint to his cross-legged winning pose, is based on Mexican tribesmen.

"Your scream sounds like a pathetic war cry"

Mexican Typhoon

Ⓟ



APPEARANCE: Guile's appearance was intended to appeal to American fans, with blonde hair and blue eyes, but most importantly, his army fatigues.

"Are you man enough to fight with me?"

Sonic Boom

← → + Ⓟ



APPEARANCE: The archetypal beast-man, original concept art suggests Blanka was initially intended to be a caveman. Rumour has it that this original design became King Rasta Mon from *Saturday Night Slam Masters*.

"Seeing you in action is a joke"

Electric Thunder

Ⓟ Ⓟ Ⓟ



APPEARANCE: Dee Jay's constant smile, thumbs-up gesture, loose drawstring pants and maracas all symbolise the laid-back lifestyle of Jamaica. The only character designed by Capcom USA, James Goddard modelled Dee Jay on martial-arts film star Billy Banks.

"Your problem is that you don't have any rhythm"

Double Dread Kick

← → + Ⓚ





APPEARANCE: Vega's performance is a nod towards the famous matadors of Spain. Early artwork suggests Vega was initially intended to be a knight in armour – his mask and claw are remnants of this.

"Handsome fighters never lose battles"

Claw Thrust

↓ ↑ + Ⓟ







APPEARANCE: As with Guile, Cammy's pale skin and blonde hair are designed to appeal to the American and European audience.

"You must enjoy being beat. Let me remodel your face one more time"

Cannon Drill
↓ ↘ → Ⓚ

ZANGIEF

APPEARANCE: Zangief's design is of the stereotypical large, muscular Russian. His size is emphasised by his lack of clothing.

"My strength is much greater than yours"

Spinning Pile Driver
⟳ Ⓟ

CHUN LI

APPEARANCE: Chun Li wears a qipao, a traditional Chinese dress, popular in the early 20th Century. Her hairstyle, 'ox-horns', is typical among Chinese children.

"I am the strongest woman in the world"

Spinning Bird Kick
↓ ↑ + Ⓚ



APPEARANCE: M.Bison's red uniform, cap and perfect posture give the air of a high-ranking military officer. His cap also carries the skull insignia of his crime syndicate, Shadaloo.

"Get lost! You can't compare with my powers"

Psycho Crusher
← → + Ⓟ





APPEARANCE: E.Honda is full of Japanese traditions. His hair, the Chonmage style, is a tradition carried on from the samurai and now popular in the sumo world. His face-paint style is known as Kumadori, a style prevalent in Kabuki actors and he wears a Yukata, a very popular outfit in Japan.

"Can't you do better than that?"

Sumo Head Butt
← → + Ⓟ







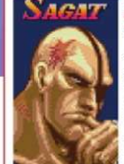


APPEARANCE: Dhalsim's necklace is assembled from the skulls of children that died in his village. Did he kill them himself? We wouldn't put it past him. The creep.

"I will meditate and then destroy you"

Yoga Flame
← ↙ ↓ ↘ → Ⓟ





APPEARANCE: Sagat's appearance is believed to derive from Thailand's Muay Thai master Reiba, as depicted in the manga *Karate Baka Ichidai.*

"You are not a warrior; you are a beginner"

Tiger Knee
↓ ↘ → Ⓚ





APPEARANCE: Fei Long is a tribute to Bruce Lee. They're from the same city and look identical. Feilong translated also means 'flying dragon' and Lee's screen name was 'little dragon'.

"You have trained to be a great loser. Now you must learn to fight"

Shienkyaku
← ↓ ↙ Ⓚ





APPEARANCE: Ryu is one of the most copied archetypes in fighting games, his look is generic but effective.

"You must defeat my Dragon Punch to stand a chance"



Sho-Ryu-Ken
→ ↓ ↘ Ⓟ





THE EMPIRE STRIKES OUT

How LucasArts ditched two sequels to its finest point-and-click adventures while simultaneously turning its back on the genre it once helped create…

LUCASARTS IS A company with two very distinct identities. For classic gamers it is the studio that defined the point-and-click adventure, evolving the medium to its greatest heights, but for modern gamers it's merely the facilitator of *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* games, and occasionally puts out an original action project or allows someone to remake its properties in Lego.

The most interesting period in the company's history, therefore, is arguably the point at which these two identities intersect, the time in which the old LucasArts ceased to be and the new, less exciting incarnation rose to prominence. That period was 2003/2004, when the studio's final two adventure projects, *Sam & Max Freelance Police* and *Full Throttle: Hell On Wheels*, were both cancelled.

The writing had been on the wall for LucasArts' adventure division for some time. The mid-Nineties brought games like *Sam & Max Hit The Road* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, two of the greatest and most popular adventures of all time, but the same period also showed that the previously neglected *Star Wars* licence was bound to eclipse such success eventually. As PC hardware became more powerful, LucasArts was able to properly realise the epic scale of the *Star Wars* universe for the first time and the 1993 release of space combat sim, *Star Wars: X-Wing* attracted an eager audience that was significantly larger than that of Guybrush Threepwood and friends.

By 1999 the *Star Wars* marketing machine was working at full power thanks to the re-release of the original film trilogy two years prior and the arrival of *The Phantom Menace* that summer. Anything with the *Star Wars* name slapped on it consequently raked in the cash and LucasArts published a total of 13 *Star Wars* games between 1998 and 2000 while only developing two point-and-click adventures during the same three years.

"There was certainly a growing sense that adventure games were going to be a harder pitch than before," says ex-LucasArts designer Sean Clark. "But LucasArts did seem committed to the notion of trying to make a go of them," adds his colleague Mike Stemmle. Both were long-serving members of LucasArts' adventure design teams who stayed until the bitter end and worked together on the company's final adventure title, *Escape From Monkey Island*.

TO ITS CREDIT, LucasArts was clearly happy – at least at this stage – to try to keep the genre alive. With *Grim Fandango*, the 2D SCUMM engine was finally put to rest in favour of the new 3D GrimE engine, which was expected to wow modern PC gamers, while *Escape From Monkey Island* was ported to PS2 in order to capitalise on the booming console market. Neither strategy did enough to keep either game from failing at retail, but Clark nevertheless insists that Lucas was moving in the right direction.

"I think we made the jump [to 3D] about the right time," he says. "We weren't part of the first round of games to require 3D hardware acceleration, which would have severely limited our audience. Creatively, some of us wanted to go 3D sooner as having a 3D world opens up a whole new tool kit for storytelling. Not being able to move the camera was a huge restriction in the 2D format. One of the biggest challenges, however, was making the 3D game look as good as the 2D predecessors. 3D graphics, especially in those days, all tended to look bright and shiny due to limitations of the hardware. A lot of adventure-game purists were initially unhappy with the direction we took, but ultimately I think they appreciated the 'new look' of adventure games and the new things we could do that compensated."

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES WAS MAKING 3D GAMES LOOK AS GOOD AS 2D


FULL THROTTLE
POLECATS



■ A scene from the *Freelance Police* trailer, which is still available to watch online, despite the cancellation.

■ The new 3D style actually looks quite similar to what Telltale eventually settled upon.

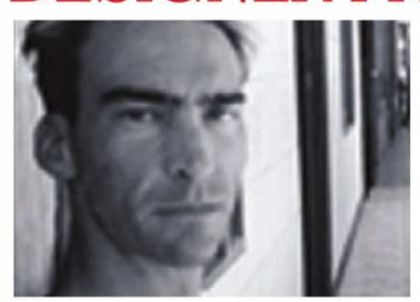
Despite the disappointing sales of both *Escape* and *Grim Fandango*, LucasArts continued to invest in the adventure genre and soon began work on two new projects that would make mutually unique attempts to broaden the potential audience. And because many of the firm's designers, including *Grim* creator Tim Schafer, had since left the company, Clark and Stemmle were split up to take charge of the two new projects independently.

Clark was placed in charge of *Full Throttle: Hell On Wheels*, a sequel that would follow Schafer's cult 1995 adventure with some unexpected new twists of its own. Chief among these was the controversial addition of real-time combat. Clark explains. "The high concept was to make the game feel more physical than the first. With that in mind, fist fighting and bike combat had been worked into the design." And, like *Monkey Island* before it, *Hell On Wheels* was designed with the lucrative console audience in mind. "Our plan was to design a game that would work well as a PC game but also feel right on a console. The reasons were both financial – to reach a broader audience – and emotional. It would be so cool," explains Clark. "The more traditional 2D graphic adventures just weren't suited to 'joystick play', but now that we had gone to 3D and were incorporating more action elements, it felt like a nice fit."

Stemmle, meanwhile, found himself returning to an old friend – two of them to be more precise. With *Sam & Max Freelance Police*, LucasArts revisited one of its most popular adventure IPs, which had the unique advantage of being just as popular in other media. What started life as an independently produced comic actually went on to become a hit animated TV show in 1997 following the success of LucasArts' 1993 adventure adaptation *Sam & Max Hit The Road*. And

DESIGNER PROFILES

The lives of our interviewees before and after their projects were cancelled



SEAN CLARK

■ CLARK JOINED LucasArts in 1990 as a programmer and worked on early adventures like *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* before moving through the ranks, eventually reaching the role of project lead on *Escape From Monkey Island* in 2000. After the cancellation of *Full Throttle: Hell On Wheels*, he briefly researched ways to "reduce the perceived risk with original IP titles" before leaving LucasArts in 2004. Since then, Clark has worked at POGO, EA's casual game portal, as studio director.



MIKE STEMMLE

■ MIKE STEMMLE also became an employee at LucasArts in 1990. There he took up the position of designer and script writer, and worked on adventure titles and action games for 14 years. Like Clark, he became a project leader on *Escape From Monkey Island* before eventually leaving the company in 2004 after the unfortunate cancellation of *Sam & Max Freelance Police*. In 2007 Stemmle joined Telltale Games, where he worked as director and designer on episodic WiiWare title *Strong Bad's Cool Game For Attractive People*.



STEVE PURCELL

■ BEFORE JOINING LucasArts to create concept art, marketing material, and in-game animation for various titles, Purcell wrote and illustrated his first *Sam & Max* comic in 1987. After leaving LucasArts in 1997, he helped write and design the *Sam & Max* cartoon and eventually landed a job in the story department of Pixar, where he worked on *Cars*. Once the rights to the *Sam & Max* videogame defaulted back to him in 2005, Purcell worked with ex-LucasArts designers at Telltale Games to create two new episodic *Sam & Max* adventures released between 2006 and 2008.

it was this cross-media pollination that arguably made *Sam & Max* the most marketable of all the LucasArts classic adventure-game properties in the modern age, and presumably lessened the risk associated with the niche genre.

As a PC-only title, *Freelance Police* could afford to revert back to the classic point-and-click style not used since 1997's *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, but it still made attempts at innovation in other departments, as original creator and *Freelance Police* co-author Steve Purcell reveals. "We approached the story in a slightly different way. It was chapter-based, a string of individual cases with an overarching thread. Since it was broken up, it allowed us to go off into some nicely diverse scenarios. Sub-Arctican penguin gods anyone?" The development staff even considered using the short story structure to create a digitally distributed episodic game at one point, while Purcell gave interviews with several US magazines, speculating that the feature could be used to distribute entirely new cases later on as bonus content. The proposed distribution method was denied during development, however, as LucasArts' management lacked faith in the untested concept.

BOTH NEW PROJECTS were announced in the summer of 2002 and were met with an enthusiastic reception from fans and press alike. There was certainly a lot of good will towards the sequels, even within LucasArts, where the staff, while aware of the difficulties facing the studio, never expected their games to be cancelled. "Speaking purely from the development perspective, *Freelance Police* was definitely one of the smoothest projects I was involved with at LucasArts, due in no small part to the veteran, drama-free team our producer, Dan Connors, assembled," says Stemmle. "That's not to say that there weren't behind-the-scenes tussles about how to market the game, but they never really seemed to be boiling up to the level of cancellation." Clark echoes similar sentiments: "There wasn't a lot of discussion ahead of time. I think everyone, including studio management, tried to delay the decision as long as possible and shield the team from the possibility."

Indeed, to the outside observer, everything seemed to be going rather smoothly. New information, trailers and screenshots for each game were released to the press in May 2003 and *Full Throttle* even appeared in playable form at that year's E3. Just a few weeks after the show, however, development of *Hell On Wheels* was unexpectedly halted. "I realised pretty much right before it happened," remembers Clark, who definitely saw the end of an era coming after *Hell On Wheels'* cancellation. "You could feel a shudder throughout the studio and it was clear then that the company was shying away from IP risk and was shifting focus towards building fewer titles. My reaction was, as you would expect, disappointment. The team had worked hard and there was some really great stuff done. It's always hard to archive great material before it's seen the light of day."



The addition of real-time combat came as a shock to some point-and-click fans.

IT'S ALWAYS HARD TO ARCHIVE GREAT MATERIAL BEFORE IT'S SEEN THE LIGHT OF DAY

Popular assumption surrounding the cancellation suggested that *Full Throttle* had been canned because LucasArts execs were unhappy with the graphical quality, but Clark cites trouble with developing the combat sequences as the project's most significant difficulty. "They were very ambitious and resource intensive," he admits. "In hindsight, I might have been able to keep the project alive longer by having decided to cut those features, but I'm not sure how happy I – or anyone else – would have been with the game."

NEWS OF FULL THROTTLE'S cancellation led many to assume that the same thing would soon happen to *Sam & Max Freelance Police*, but LucasArts did everything to reassure the fans that this would not be the case and that the game was still on track for an early-2004 release. Post-*Full Throttle*, Clark joined the *Freelance Police* team and, in the words of Steve Purcell, "it seemed like the production was in capable hands and moving forwards swimmingly."

2003 waned into the new year and LucasArts continued to promote *Freelance Police* as it neared completion,

FULL THROTTLE: PAYBACK

HELL ON WHEELS was the second *Full Throttle* sequel after the 2000 attempt from *Curse Of Monkey Island* designers Larry Ahern and Bill Tiller. *Full Throttle: Payback* was six months into development when the plug was pulled, leaving 25% of the game design planned, 40% of the background concepts painted, and the 3D character models built. Still, Clark maintains that few ideas from *Payback* made it into *Hell On Wheels*. "There were plenty of proposals and game concepts – original and sequels – that never got off the ground," he says. "Some were official, others were word of mouth… There were at least five sequels pitched for *Loom* that I was aware of. *Payback* hadn't gained much traction before the guys proposing it went on to other projects. I feel it's dangerous to try to pick up someone else's pieces and try to build something out of them. Instead, I'd prefer to build a design framework for the game I'm thinking of, then apply ideas that support the framework. So I approached *Full Throttle 2* with a story I wanted to tell in the world Tim Schafer created. The final game design had ideas from all sorts of people and conversations, so some elements of *Payback* may well have found their way in."

■ Despite the similarities, Mike Stemmle maintains that Telltale's *Sam & Max* was not based on the *Freelance Police* script. "LucasArts owns the rights to those stories, lock, stock and giant wicker rabbit. It's probably for the best in hindsight. Some of those ideas were bit ambitious."

I GOT A CRYPTIC EMAIL FROM MIKE SAYING 'COULD YOU STOP BY THIS AFTERNOON?'

giving interviews with the specialist press and even granting cover features to some magazines mere weeks before the intended release date. And then, one day, "I got a cryptic email from Mike Stemmle saying 'could you stop by this afternoon?'," says Purcell. Once again, LucasArts had unexpectedly cut short the development of a promising adventure title, and not because of any issue with the game's quality.

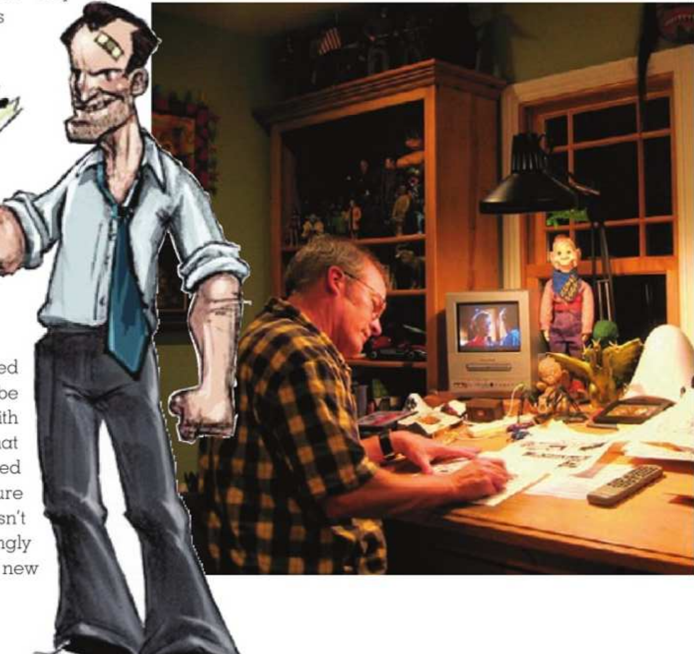
The immediate reaction from the team was one of quite understandable disbelief. "It was very discouraging," recalls Purcell. "I got the news from the crew themselves, who gallantly continued working on the game like the musicians on the Titanic. I know how cancellation rumours go: people tend to assume there was something wrong with a game that gets canned. I didn't want the crew to get blamed for the decision so I issued a public comment to let the fans know that the game was in good shape and that I was confused by the cancellation."

STEMMLE WAS SIMILARLY perplexed that a game so close to completion would be denied release, and clearly disagrees with the decision to this day. "I've often joked that the reason *Freelance Police* got cancelled is that thousands of European adventure gamers suddenly dropped dead. Which isn't too far from what I was told," he shockingly reveals. "LucasArts had apparently hired a new marketing analysis group, and they informed us that the entire European adventure gaming market – a critical component to the success of any big-budget graphic adventure game – had simply disappeared. Not shrunk, not cratered, just… disappeared. Gone. Vaporised. Poof. Frankly, I consider this one of the great, unsolved mysteries of the early-21st Century."

With *Sam & Max* such an immensely popular IP, public reaction to the cancellation was extremely vocal. The promising trailer – which you can still view online if you look in the right places – had created such a swell of expectation that the fallout was swift and powerful. Public protest websites were started and angry emails were sent to LucasArts, prompting the company to issue a brief statement citing "current marketplace realities and underlying economic conditions" as the reasons for the cancellation.

LucasArts' explanation had a discouraging sense of finality to it. This wasn't just the closure of any old game, but a resignation to the belief that an entire genre could not be profitable in the modern age. "In April of 2004, after nearly 14 years at LucasArts, I – along with a lot of talented folks – was let go as the company decided to abandon original IP development to focus on building *Star Wars* titles with external development groups," says Clark. "It's sad that the companies with the most resources and talent seem to have a collapse of confidence in their ability to create and deliver compelling new ideas."

As Purcell puts it, LucasArts was "doing what they feel is necessary to stay in business." But could the unwanted end of the company's most beloved period have been avoided? "It's too easy to say now what I think someone else should have done then," Clark concedes. "But from where I was sitting, the genre was profitable. I think all the adventure games individually turned a profit, and I am sure there were ways to mitigate risk, but there was a strong current pushing the company to make more 'mainstream'



DOUBLE TAKE

■ WHEN DEVELOPMENT of *Full Throttle: Payback* was announced, series creator Tim Schafer was still at LucasArts and less than pleased with the situation. "I was torn about the *Full Throttle* sequel because it was very personal to me," he recalls. "That was my game, they were my characters, so to see someone else make that game actually made my stomach turn upside down. And that's one of the reasons I started my own company, because when they announced *Full Throttle 2* they hadn't even come to talk to me about it or ask what I would do with a sequel. I couldn't stop them because they owned the property, all I could do was start my own company where I could own my own work and control whether there was a sequel or not. So in some ways it was a good thing because those events led to the formation of DoubleFine."



■ With *Freelance Police* so close to completion, it would be nice if LucasArts could finish the game off and release it digitally. Come on, George, make it happen.

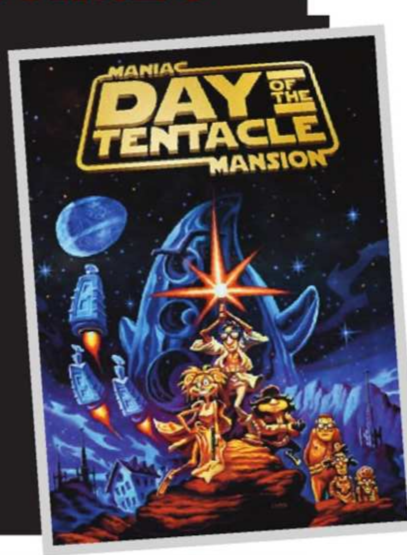




Star Wars Adventure

IF STAR WARS videogames were taking over LucasArts' profit margins and adventure videogames were dwindling, wouldn't it have made sense to combine the two? We asked Sean Clark exactly why an official *Star Wars* point-and-click title was never released. "Well, it was certainly contemplated on a number of occasions," he reveals openly. "It briefly appeared on SKU plans, and even had some design work done, but it never went to green light.

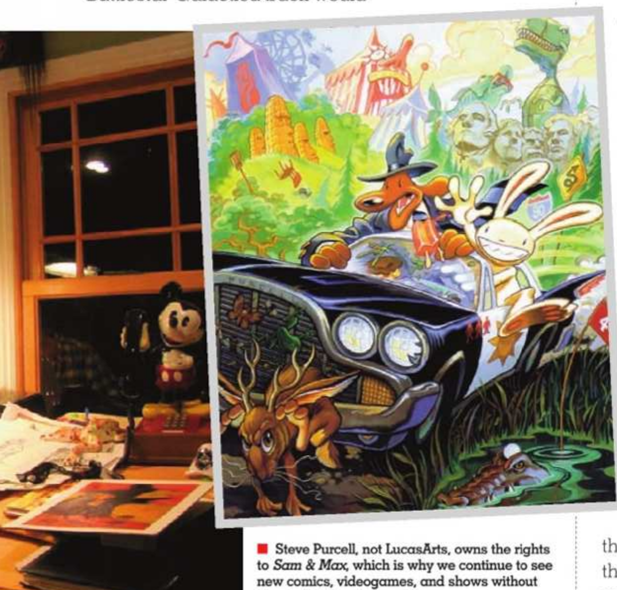
I think the biggest problem was that none of the folks building adventure games were particularly interested in making *Star Wars* games. Given the choice, we wanted to create our own worlds, where we could tell jokes and not pass every line of dialogue past the licensing department for approval. And the guys who wanted to make *Star Wars* videogames weren't really interested in building an adventure game. It was certainly a missed opportunity."



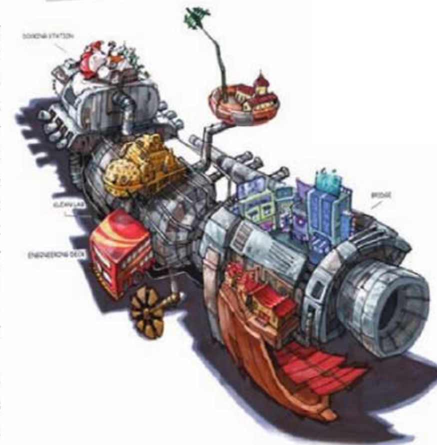
products, so I doubt there was much that could have been done then. A lot has changed since then, however, and I hope LucasArts explores other avenues again, including the genres for which it was once renowned."

■■■ **COULD LUCASARTS EVER** return to the genre it once single-handedly defined? Aside from hiding *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* on the upcoming *Staff Of Kings* disc, the studio has spent the last five years acting as though it had never even heard of point-and-click, but our respondents refuse to rule out an about-turn. "Never say never," says Stemmle. "I mean, who honestly thought bringing *Battlestar Galactica* back would turn out to be a great idea? Oh drat, now I have a really cool/awful idea for a *Maniac Mansion* game shot with a shaky-cam, featuring a suicidally depressed Bernard who swears a lot and has angry sex with Purple Tentacle…" Joking aside, Stemmle, who now works at Telltale Games, doesn't necessarily feel that LucasArts' participation is even relevant to the future of adventure games any longer. "I don't think it's a question of whether a genre 'needs' such and such a company to jump into the pool. I just think the industry as a whole does better when there's more diversity. If that diversity's coming from a gal in her garage, a scrappy independent, or a super-studio, it really doesn't matter. The more the merrier."

Purcell, who is an occasional Telltale Games collaborator, likewise feels that the new ideas necessary in 2003 have subsequently been implemented successfully without any involvement from LucasArts. "The idea of episodic games, though discussed very much back in the day, has taken a long time to get its footing. I think what Telltale has done right is building a community of fans, doing stuff they really care about, and keeping the games rolling out the door on a regular basis." However, that's not to say that none of us would like to see Guybrush, Bernard or Zak disappear for good, as Purcell reminds us: "If LucasArts thrive, and looking around they find that there is still a market for adventure games, maybe they will make room for them again. In the meantime, I think it would be great if they embraced their history and let someone put those classic adventure games on handhelds or cell phones. The old-style graphics are ideal to compress down onto tiny screens. And even if they don't make any new ones right away, they could still celebrate the great adventure games that they were responsible for." As you can probably imagine, we couldn't agree more.



■ Steve Purcell, not LucasArts, owns the rights to *Sam & Max*, which is why we continue to see new comics, videogames, and shows without the studio's involvement.





■ You'll never get to control Ben Throttle in his full three-dimensional glory.



■ Did you get to play a rock music mini-game here? We'll probably never know.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Your monthly guide to the rarest retro treasures



FORMAT: C64
YEAR: 1987
PUBLISHER: US Gold/ Rainbow Arts
DEVELOPER: Time Warp Productions
EXPECT TO PAY: £20 (tape) £60 (disk)



EXHIBIT A: This is the UK edition of *The Great Giana Sisters*. It's thought to be the rarest, but the German one, with different box art, usually goes for more at auction.

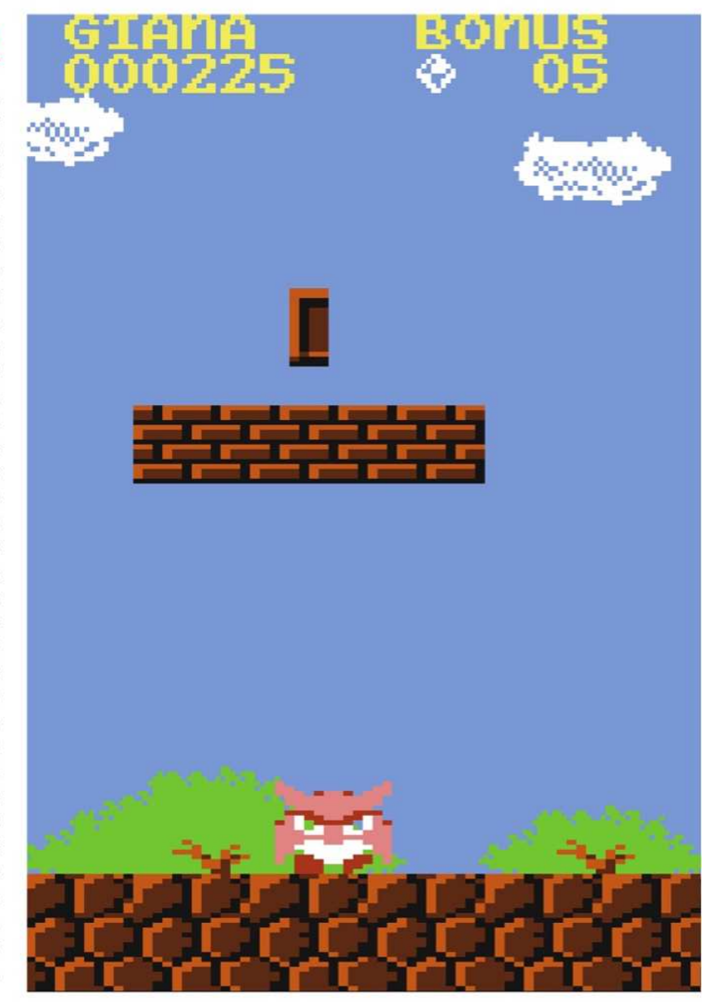


EXHIBIT B: The tape version is comparatively cheaper than the disk release. You can expect to pay more for the German version too.

THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS

Why It's Rare

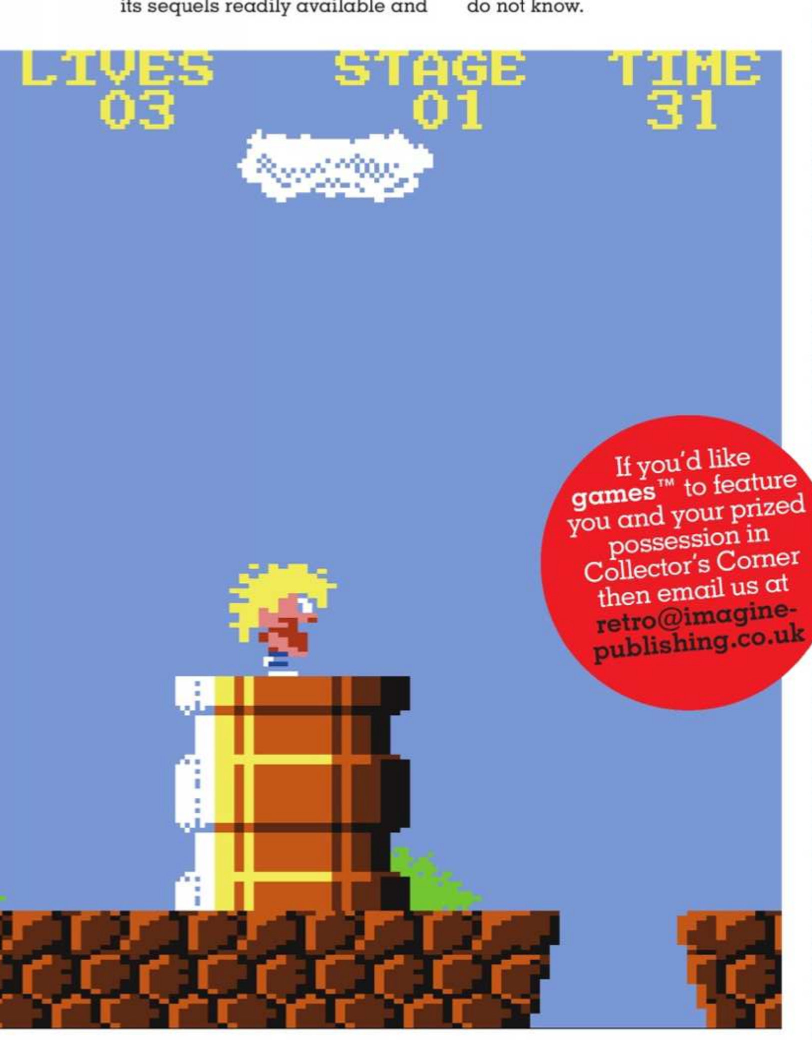
IT'S ALL NINTENDO'S fault. Well, sort of. *The Great Giana Sisters* was intentionally made to cash in on the *Super Mario Bros* craze of the mid-Eighties and was the closest you could get at the time to playing the Miyamoto classic without owning a NES. The game was basically the same, following the same level designs but with different sprites. What's more, the publisher deliberately used the similarity to *Super Mario Bros* to sell the game, making thinly veiled references to Mario and Luigi in adverts and using review quotes that mentioned both games in the same breath. Nintendo, which was no stranger to lawsuits, was understandably annoyed and soon tried to have *The Great Giana Sisters* removed from sale. It succeeded, of course, and very few UK copies made it into the hands of the gaming public. It was also removed from sale in its native Germany and, though it had been available for a year there, that too became quite scarce. Over 20 years later, Nintendo has loosened up a little. A mobile phone version of *Giana* was approved in 2005 and a Nintendo DS version is currently in the works. The original C64 release, however, remains one of the most prized collectables on the system.



Worth Playing?

WELL, YES AND NO. As a clone of *Super Mario Bros, The Great Giana Sisters* was obviously a very good videogame, and back in 1987 you could consider it an essential Commodore 64 purchase. The NES and it's games were extremely expensive in the UK at the time and only the wealthiest of families could actually afford one – leaving no alternative for home computer users but to play unofficial clones instead.

22 years on, however, there is little point – beyond curiosity – in bothering to play. With official copies of *Super Mario Bros* and its sequels readily available and affordable, there are few reasons to play a clone, especially one that, like most C64 platformers, requires you to tap 'up' on the joystick to jump. As such *The Great Giana Sisters* is best bought for its historical interest than anything else. There's something very cool about owning something that a big corporation tried to take away. And if you've never actually seen *The Great Giana Sisters* it can be fascinating to see just how close its developers came to replicating Miyamoto's magic at the time. Quite how they thought they would ever get away with it, we do not know.



If you'd like **games**™ to feature you and your prized possession in Collector's Corner then email us at **retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk**



I'VE GOT ONE

Name: **Mat Allen**
Occupation: **IT Support Specialist**

How did you hear about *Great Giana Sisters*?
GGS is one of those games with an infamous past, and I actually had the chance to buy it originally when it arrived on these shores in 1988. I saw it on sale in the local Boots, but didn't have enough money to buy it. When I returned two days later I was informed all copies had to be returned to the warehouse. Of course, down the line I was to find out why. I eventually got myself a cracked copy and contented myself with playing that until such time as I lucked upon finding an original.

How and where did you find the game?
It wasn't until 1999 at a small computer show that I had a chance to get my hands on an original. Someone there was selling off a bunch of C64 games, but he just had a list with him. The idea was to take orders and then get payment and send the games out after the show. *The Great Giana Sisters* was listed and no one had reserved it by the time I happened to see it. Two weeks after the show, it was finally in my hands. When I got the boxed disk version, a few years later, it was missing the manual. Soon after, I bought a slightly corrupted loose disk and manual from ex-*Zzap!64* editor Gordon Houghton, and was able to repair that disk using the first one.

What condition was the disk/tape in and what did you pay?
All copies are in good condition and work fine. I paid 15 quid for the complete tape, probably about the same for the boxed disk, and a fiver for the loose disk and manual. Probably below the value they go for now.

Do you play it and, if so, what do you think of it?
I played the game quite extensively back in the day, and it has to be said that it is one of those titles that falls in the minority category of "rare and good". Most rare games are rare because they were bad and/or sold poorly, usually both. This was one of those exceptions. Sure it's no *SMB* beater, but it's certainly an excellent clone.

Would you ever consider selling *Great Giana Sisters*?
I may slim down the collection over time, but *GGS* would be one of those games toward the back end of being let go. Who knows though, circumstances always change. You won't get amazingly rich off selling C64 games yet, even with a fistful of *Ultima*s and *MULE*s, unlike certain console markets.

BEHIND THE SCENES

NIGHTS INTO DREAMS

Sonic's dad, Yuji Naka, speaks about his other, less known but equally loved, offspring





NiGHTS's 360 degree movement, aided by the analog controller, felt smoother and more satisfying than anything else at the time.

YUJI NAKA, AND his former development studio, Sonic Team, may well be most famous for creating *Sonic The Hedgehog*, but over the years the veteran game designer has been responsible for so many more significant videogames than the 'hedgehog with attitude'. You name it, *Phantasy Star Online*, *Burning Rangers*, *Samba De Amigo*. Naka has been responsible for a list of classics so long it could rival the work of even Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto. Of all his games however, there is one that stands head and shoulders above the rest. It is still one of the most inventive and original games of all time and is dearest to the heart of almost every long-time Sega fan. We are of course referring to the wondrous *NiGHTS Into Dreams*.

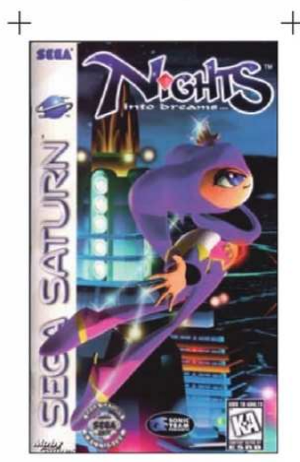
1996 was a landmark year for 3D platformers, with every major console playing host to a game that revolutionised the genre. N64 launched with *Super Mario 64*, and the multiformat *Tomb Raider* found its natural home on PlayStation. The Saturn, meanwhile, was bestowed with *NiGHTS*, a platform game so unique, so completely unconventional that it's hard to call it a platformer at all. And while Mario and Lara leapt into the history books, *NiGHTS* was somehow forgotten by all but the hardcore. Those who do remember it however, know that *NiGHTS* was a sublime experience. Its goal – to fly a floating jester-like creature through the dreams of two children, collecting orbs and comboing 'links' between checkpoints – was unlike that of any other game, yet it was typical of just how different Sega was to its competitors in the mid-Nineties.

Pinpointing *NiGHTS*' inspiration is not easy. Though its speed and motion vaguely recall the fluid movements of Sonic, there really isn't a game like it, so it's unsurprising that Naka found inspiration from outside the television screen. "*NiGHTS* has been inspired by various titles and characters," he says, "I personally think that it was inspired by my very favourite, Cirque du Soleil's Mystère". A



THE FIRST PERSON WHO TOUCHED THE TRIAL VERSION OF THE ANALOGUE PAD WAS ACTUALLY STEVEN SPIELBERG



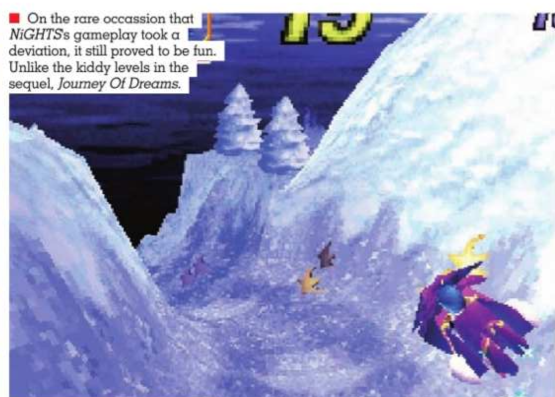



Released: 1996
Format: Saturn
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team

KEY STAFF:
Yuji Naka
Producer, Lead Programmer
Naoto Ohshima
Director
Takashi Iizuka
Lead Game Designer



On the rare occassion that *NiGHTS*'s gameplay took a deviation, it still proved to be fun. Unlike the kiddy levels in the sequel, *Journey Of Dreams*.



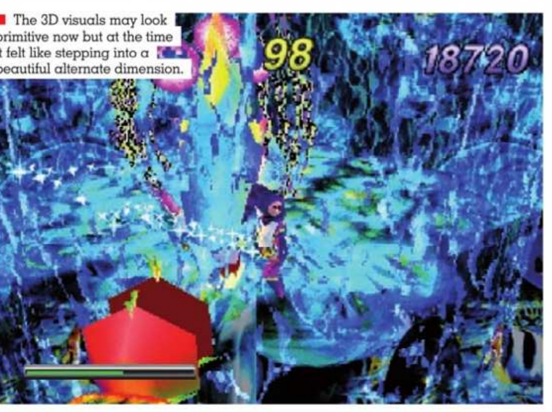








The 3D visuals may look primitive now but at the time it felt like stepping into a beautiful alternate dimension.









SWOOPER D

For a long long time this was my favourite game ever. There's still nothing else quite like it. The music was sublime and the graphics (at the time) were fantastic. The gameplay was incredible, so easy to pick up and a joy to play, but immensly addictive if you wanted to beat your own scores. Whether it be highest scores, biggest multiplier, most links or quickest time there was always something to beat on *NiGHTS*. *Christmas NiGHTS* added yet another side to it with some more structured chalenges. A beautiful beautiful game. The less said about the Wii Sequel though, the better.



ALISTAIR THOMAS

I first played *Christmas NiGHTS* after getting a free copy from Currys, and was hooked immediately. I eventually picked up the full game (bundled with the analogue controller, for £20 from Cyprus, which I thought was a bargain at the time, despite the shop assistant telling me it wouldn't work on my Saturn) and really put some time into perfecting each level. My favourite memory of the game is the theme song - so cheesy and catchy.

SICKMOTH

I never played it but always really, really, really wanted to - and still do. But I went PS1 instead of Saturn, dammit. Then a friend bought the remake, which was fun for all of 10 minutes. A missed opportunity.

MFNICK

Magical game. Spent hours upon hours getting the perfect rank on every level & then bettering my scores.

HAZEYHAZE

It just made you feel all warm and fuzzy inside.


They don't make 'em like this any more. And when they do, it somehow goes horribly wrong.



What They Said...



Forget everything else. This is the greatest game of the year. It's a dream come true. You cannot afford to miss this amazing game!

Sega Saturn Magazine, Issue 10, August 1996

A brief look at the Las Vegas stage show, in which graceful masquerade characters bounce and soar through a dream-like landscape filled with mesmerising patterns that shift with the action, certainly throws up a few similarities. The visual likeness between performance and game shows exactly where *NiGHTS*' fluid movements originated, but how did Naka intend to transfer those movements into the hands of the player?

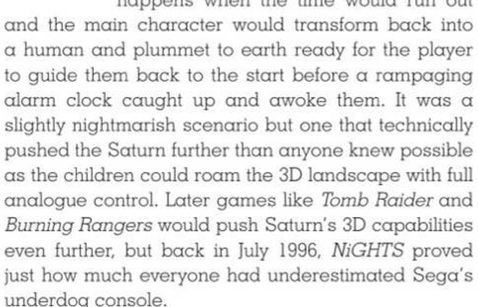
Of course, *NiGHTS* could function normally with a standard Saturn control pad, but the ease with which the main character could glide through the air, diving, looping and pirouetting at will, was at odds with the controller's stubborn digital D-pad. A custom controller, specifically designed for the acrobatic needs of *NiGHTS* was just what Sonic Team needed. "The analogue pad was a must-have item in terms of having the players experience the great feeling of flying in the air. Also, this might be a secret but the first person who touched the trial version of the analogue pad was actually Steven Spielberg. When he visited Sega, I did a presentation of *NiGHTS*, and that is when he touched the pad," recalls Naka with some pride for the innovative controller that launched alongside the game just 12 days after *Super Mario 64* debuted with its own specially designed controller. The impact of Nintendo's pad quickly resonated throughout the industry with other companies soon redesigning their own pads to match. In some ways this was a shame as the limelight could so easily have shone on Sega's controller had release schedules been different.


YUJI NAKA
Producer

As with Nintendo's own landmark, Sega's controller brought the player closer to the game, involving them in the action as no other had done before. It was a feeling that Sonic Team had persevered long and hard to achieve. "Expressing the feeling of flying in the air and the creation of a totally new system was very challenging and required trial and error," says Naka. "The intention was to have the players feel synchronised and reflect itself to the playing character. This is the reason why we tested quite a lot of different patterns. I remember having to narrow them down."

The relationship between the player and the gameworld was obviously of the utmost importance to Sonic Team, who strove to inject as much emotion into the game as possible, so much so that the results often surprised Naka himself. "Since *NiGHTS* was created to affect as many people as possible, we researched a lot of colours and meanings of things by using different methods including dream diagnosis. I remember crying when checking the in-game movies. I have actually developed many games, but this was the first and last time I was moved by my own game," he unexpectedly admits. Continuing on the subject of emotion, he reveals that: "The part I feel most proud of is that we succeeded in affecting people without using words. In recent games, characters speak words and I feel that worldwide, people are less likely to play by sharing the same emotions and feelings. Many people wrote to us saying that *NiGHTS* had affected them very much, and our staff were also very overwhelmed by it."

Where *NiGHTS* impressed on an emotional level, it equally made waves in the technological department. Although utilising full 3D polygonal graphics, most of *NiGHTS* had originally been designed to play on a 2D plane with fixed camera angles determining the course of the action. Yet the power of the Saturn, which was predominantly designed as a 2D console, allowed Sonic Team to do much more with the game than they had anticipated. "At the start we thought that developing in full 3D would be very difficult so we created a 2D/3D system for *NiGHTS*, however, in the midstream we started to think that it might be possible and started to experiment. The result was great and that is what came to be Claris and Elliot's on-foot section." The section he refers to happens when the time would run out and the main character would transform back into a human and plummet to earth ready for the player to guide them back to the start before a rampaging alarm clock caught up and awoke them. It was a slightly nightmarish scenario but one that technically pushed the Saturn further than anyone knew possible as the children could roam the 3D landscape with full analogue control. Later games like *Tomb Raider* and *Burning Rangers* would push Saturn's 3D capabilities even further, but back in July 1996, *NiGHTS* proved just how much everyone had underestimated Sega's underdog console.



Innovations followed in AI too. Sonic Team began experimenting with what would become the A-Life system: a feature that would reappear in Dreamcast's *Sonic Adventure* but would remain an under-appreciated addition among most players. "The A-Life was developed with the team's desire to show the life of living creatures in a very realistic environment throughout the game. The characters performed much better than I had imagined so I enjoyed it very much," explains Naka. The A-Life creatures took the

form of cherub-like beings, called Nightopians, which hatched from eggs, roamed the game's landscape and evolved differently depending on their experiences. Some would learn to play musical instruments, some would breed with the indigenous enemies to create new life forms and others could even die tragically if the player flew too close to them. In reality, the Nightopians had zero effect on gameplay, but they were one of the many fascinating incidental parts of *NiGHTS* that kept dedicated players returning to explore the gameworld.

Upon release, *NiGHTS* scored well in most specialist magazines, but failed to have any significant impact on the charts thanks to the Saturn's poor sales in the West. Still, the game was adored by well-informed Saturn owners encouraged to play it by enthusiastic reviews in the likes of Mean Machines and Computer & Video Games. Those who put the time into *NiGHTS* were rewarded with a quite unexpected experience. Though some thought the game too easy because levels could be completed by merely collecting enough orbs and swiftly moving on to the next level, they had mostly missed the point. *NiGHTS* was a game that asked its players to replay every level, perfecting their route around the twisting courses so that they could combo 'links' together by moving through every on-screen ring as quickly as possible without missing any. In essence, it was the only platformer of the time that could be truly played as a score-attack game, and would go on to influence many forthcoming videogames including several rhythm-action titles and even the *Tony Hawk's* series, though few realise it.

This would be the point at which most behind-the-scenes features come to an end, but for Sega fans there's something about *NiGHTS* that is even more precious than the game itself and we couldn't resist asking Naka about it. *Christmas NiGHTS* was a two-level demo of NiGHTS given to Saturn owners as a Christmas present in Japan in December 1996, and in the UK the following December. The disc was more than just a simple demo however; the Saturn's internal clock knew when it was being played, and changed the game accordingly. It would play like an ordinary demo until Christmas time when the setting and characters would magically go all festive with tinsel, presents and Christmas trees everywhere. Finishing the demo rewarded the player with a random 'gift', some of which were very simple illustration galleries while others were incredibly special such as the Karaoke mode or even the level that changed the main character into Sonic the Hedgehog, and the level's boss into Dr Robotnik. Due to its inventive twist on the *NiGHTS* formula and the fact that the game was completely free, *Christmas NiGHTS* is as well loved as the game itself. To this day, many Saturn owners will habitually dust off the decade-old classic every Christmas to re-live the joy of playing this unique videogame. So how did *Christmas NiGHTS* come about?

"*NiGHTS* was the last title I contributed to as a main programmer and also the time that a position as a producer started to become clear," explains Naka. "In order to introduce the title to as many people as possible, I created promotional assets such as videos and pamphlets. However, most of all, by creating *Christmas NiGHTS* I was able to plan services for fans – it was a good challenge for me. The creation of *Christmas NiGHTS* had two purposes. It was to create a wonderful game and let as many people as possible know, and it was also a Christmas present for the fans from us. To tell the truth, I am a fan of *Lemmings*, and at the time I was developing *Sonic 2* – I was in the United States. One day, when I went to the store, I found a product called *Christmas Lemmings* and that felt like a Christmas present from the creator of *Lemmings*. I wanted the fans to feel that same happiness through the game that I created."

So there you have it. Although Naka admits that *Christmas NiGHTS* was intended as a marketing tool, it's heart-warming to see how much he considered the happiness of Sega fans. In fact, *NiGHTS* is one of the last Sega games we can remember that felt so special. It was a magical experience that bewildered the uninitiated but permanently endeared itself to any who gave it a whirl. If you've never played *NiGHTS Into Dreams* then we implore you to hunt down a Saturn and give the game a try. But then, we're sure that our readers know a truly special Sega game when they see it. After all, it was voted the twelfth best game of all time in issue 42, a fact we felt compelled to relay to Naka. And his response? "I am very happy to see this. I am also a big fan of *NiGHTS* so I am overwhelmed that it is loved. Thank you very much."

I REMEMBER CRYING WHEN CHECKING THE IN-GAME MOVIES. THIS WAS THE ONLY TIME I WAS MOVED BY MY OWN GAME


There weren't many games that could have influenced NiGHTS. Instead, Naka took inspiration from Cirque du Soleil's Mystere.

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



The fast, fluid action of *Sonic The Hedgehog* was evolved to its natural conclusion in *NiGHTS*'s 360 degree flight action.


NiGHTS has had a direct influence on surprisingly few games over the years but Sony's *Flower* definitely captures the same sensations.



Hall Of Fame…
Guybrush Threepwood

Featuring swordfights, theft, three-headed monkeys, a dodgy used-boat salesmen and zombie pirates

WHEN PEOPLE LOOK back on the early years of LucasArts, before *Star Wars* tie-ins were a prominent feature, they remember its range of classic adventure-game characters. Pushed for a favourite, many will pick Guybrush Threepwood, a wannabe pirate who unwittingly came up against the evil ghost pirate LeChuck. Guybrush's arrival on Melee Island in the first *Secret Of Monkey Island* title is shrouded in mystery; all we know is that he intends to become a 'mighty pirate'. Guybrush's journey to fulfil this dream forms the bulk of the first part of the game, where he must embark on the Three Trials involving treasure hunting, sword fighting, and stealing the Idol of Many Hands from the Governor, his future love interest Elaine Marley. Guybrush's past is only loosely touched upon during the controversial ending of *Monkey Island 2* when referencing his brother Chuckie, but as the third game was developed by a different team, any further background remains in Ron Gilbert's imagination.

GUYBRUSH'S BLOCKY, LO-RES appearance is a result of hardware limitations, with only 16 colours at the developer's disposal and a small resolution of 320 x 200. Any fleshing out of his appearance is done in the form of close-up still screens, where his curly golden hair, blue eyes and boyish charm help convey his naive and somewhat innocent personality. His name, quite possibly the daftest to feature in a game, came about by accident, rather than design. The animation file was generically entitled 'Guy' while art package Deluxe Paint called a selected file a 'Brush', which resulted in the image being saved as 'Guybrush'. His surname, Threepwood, was picked from an internal company competition, with rival nemesis LeChuck named purely because general manager Steve Arnold wanted a character named Chuck in the game.

In the second game, Guybrush took on a different appearance, casting aside his raggy clothes in favour of a blue jacket, red boots and other finery as a result of his fame and fortune from defeating LeChuck. His hair's slightly darker and he even attempts to grow a beard, although, given its lack of visibility, it's more bum fluff than facial hair. Digs at his youthful demeanour despite being older suggest that beneath the visual changes he remains the same slightly inept goofy pirate wannabe with the fate of the world on his shoulders.

With different designers behind the creation of *Curse Of Monkey Island* – Ron Gilbert having left LucasArts in favour of warmer climes at his new company Humongous Entertainment – Guybrush took on a modern look that went back to the series' roots. It was also the first *Monkey Island* to give Guybrush a voice. And while the sound of characters rarely reach expectations, Dominic Armato did a good job of portraying his witty, slightly clueless personality. One noticeable change was in his relationship with Elaine Marley, who he proposes to very early on, in stark contrast to the occasion when he played with her emotions in *Monkey Island 2* to get his hands on a piece of treasure map.

The final game, *Escape From Monkey Island*, retained his visual appearance, this time remodelled into the world of 3D. This jump to three dimensions stripped the character models of their vibrant charm encountered in the last three games, and while Dominic Armato once again reprises the role of Guybrush, the lacklustre script means that his personality never gets the chance to shine. Returning from honeymoon with Elaine Marley, Guybrush comes across as a hen-pecked husband, never really standing out in his own right as in previous escapades. By this point the popularity of PC adventure titles had already gone downhill, with many gamers turning to RPGs and consoles for their fix. The fact that the majority of the development team behind the previous three games had already fled LucasArts by this point proved that the company was now more interested in fleshing out the *Star Wars* franchise than investing resources in its adventure division.

Although he may have started off as a few pixels, Guybrush Threepwood's influence on the adventure game scene cannot be underestimated. Future adventures from other companies had striking similarities to the character – Gilbert Goodmate is a Guybrush clone and pirate lead Jack Keane bears more than a passing resemblance to *Monkey Island's* star – while the SCUMM interface paved the way for many others including *Flight Of The Amazon Queen*, the *Simon The Sorcerer* series and *Ankh*. The fifth *Monkey Island* may never see the light of day, but Guybrush's influence lives on in the internet scene, where many fans recreate his adventures in their very own indie creations.

>. MAGIC MOMENTS



Poisoning poodles to get into the mansion is at least done in a friendly way.



Trading insults with pirates is one of the most enjoyable aspects of *Monkey Island*.



Guybrush tries out some distraction tactics on the cannibals, but ultimately fails.



Leave Guybrush under water for more than ten minutes and he will die.

HAIR

Guybrush's golden locks take on slightly different forms throughout the games, starting off as blond and curly, becoming darker for his second outing and then blond and flowing in the third game. His quiff-like style of the last game reflects his status as the husband of Governor Marley.

CHEST

The choice of simple black-and-white clothing in the first game is a result of hardware limitations, where only 16 colours could be used. While the second game saw Guybrush wearing more colourful garments, the following two revert back to the original black-and-white setup.

MOUTH

Guybrush will have to talk his way out of many situations, one of the most memorable being that of insult sword fighting. As he fights pirate after pirate, Guybrush will learn some of the wittiest lines in the series that will equip him to face more formidable foes.

HAND

Like many adventure games, collecting objects is a key part of the adventure, and Guybrush will have to fetch an assortment of items, from rubber chickens with a pulley in the middle to mugs of grog, and in a later game, a banjo fit for a duel.

BOOTS

While his boots will change colour in each game to reflect his economic status, they enable Guybrush to do a lot of walking, whether it's exploring forests, travelling across the respective islands or delivering items to important characters.



■ Guybrush embarks in a spitting competition fit for the mightiest pirate.



■ To gatecrash a party, Guybrush gets into the spirit of things with a pink dress. Suits you, sir.



■ *Curse Of Monkey Island* continued Ron Gilbert's legacy with some spectacular artwork by Bill Tiller.



■ *Escape From Monkey Island* was the series' low point, with awkward controls and dull dialogue.

THE EVOLUTION OF SCUMM

■■■ EVER SINCE MANIAC MANSION, THE SCUMM ENGINE HAS BEEN PIVOTAL IN THE SUCCESS OF LUCASARTS' ADVENTURE TITLES AND HAS GONE ON TO BE IMITATED BY OTHER COMPANIES. WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE INTERFACE AND HOW IT HAS BEEN REFINED OVER TIME TO PROVIDE SOME OF GAMING'S MOST MEMORABLE ENCOUNTERS

1987

MANIAC MANSION

> The first game to make use of the Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion (SCUMM) interface[1] by Ron Gilbert as a result of being "tired of typing everything" during an adventure like Sierra's range. It would be the interface that was used in every LucasArts adventure since, and other companies went on to imitate in their adventure game creations. *Maniac Mansion* was also the first title to make use of multiple playable characters.[2]

1988

ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS

> David Fox's creation used an improved version of SCUMM[3] that had been continually tweaked in the background by Ron Gilbert. Like *Maniac Mansion*, the game allowed players to switch control of characters at certain points of the adventure. The point-and-click mechanism resembled text, requiring a player to click on items to bring up a description or the 'what is' command[4] to highlight what can be selected. The game also had a rarely used 'buy' command.[5]



1989

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

> An IQ system[6] was tied into the SCUMM engine, meaning players could score points by solving puzzles differently upon restoring saved games. This meant puzzles had several solutions, offering replay value. A dialogue system allowed choices during conversation and the verbs 'look' and 'talk'[7] were introduced and used in subsequent adventures. A combat system was used to fight through certain areas.

1995

THE DIG

> Due to its heavy use of cut-scenes, *The Dig* uses the INSANE engine to compress its high-detailed video sequences. New rendering techniques were used and iMuse provided atmosphere. The point-and-click interface differs slightly, with the cursor changing when pressing the mouse button if it's possible to use. Clicking on a character brings up conversation options in the form of icons[16] while the inventory is accessed by pressing the second mouse button.



1997

THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND

> Like *Full Throttle*, the SCUMM interface revolved around one icon, this time themed around the world of pirates.[17] iMuse was used to seamlessly blend musical themes, with several puzzles containing interactive music in the form of banjo duelling and a rhyming pirate song. *Curse* was the last game to use SCUMM, with future releases using GRIME instead.



1990
LOOM

> A musical adventure, *Loom* abandoned the constraints of a textual interface in favour of a musical staff with notes.[8] The player never picks up an item, the emphasis instead is on touching items on screen to conjure up a selection of musical notes, which could then be written down to form the basis of a spell. The different use of the in-built SCUMM engine meant *Loom* offered a different but rather enchanting experience. Close-ups of character portraits were also a first for LucasArts adventures and helped provide more personality.





1990
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

> While using the same SCUMM engine from *Last Crusade*, the 'what is' command disappeared in favour of item descriptions appearing when touched with the cursor. The biggest jump came with the dialogue system,[9] where the structure enabled conversation choices at all times and allowed the sword-fighting puzzle system, with the right response needed to progress.

1991
MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

> The SCUMM interface was refined by dropping a couple of verbs[10] (turn on and turn off) and made larger to become more visible to the player, with items represented by pictures[11] as well as text. The iMuse system – created by Michael Land and Peter McConnell – was also first used in the game and allowed music to fade in and out from one theme to the next seamlessly to create atmosphere.



1995
FULL THROTTLE

> The INteractive Streaming ANimation Engine (INSANE) created by Vincent Lee was integrated to the SCUMM interface to compress movie sequences and *Road Rash*-inspired chase events. To reflect the game's biker theme, the interface was made to resemble a biker's tattoo[15] featuring all the necessary commands in one icon.





1992
INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

> It was the first and only adventure from LucasArts to introduce a three-tier system[12] where a decision made from a conversion with Sophia Hapgood influenced the game's direction. Depending on your choice, the game could be played with Sophia for co-op-based puzzles, alone with lots of puzzles, or alone but with lots of action. The game used the improved iMuse system and re-introduced the IQ points from *Raiders*.

1993
SAM & MAX: HIT THE ROAD

> To fit the wacky cartoon nature of *Sam & Max*, the verb system was replaced with visual icons[14] at the base of the screen with additional options, such as new topics of conversation, also represented pictorially. Clicking the right mouse button enables the cursor to change into different actions including 'walk', 'talk', 'look' and 'use'. These were easy to use and fitted in with the style of play while keeping the screen uncluttered.

1993
DAY OF THE TENTACLE

> The SCUMM engine was brought forward with the re-introduction of character swapping[13] featured in *Maniac Mansion*. Only three playable characters were used because of the strain on resources that came from using far more animation and scripting. Technical limitations came as a result of developing on floppy first, voices being the main difference for the CD release.





TAKAHASHI TAKAHASHI TAKAHASHI

'16-SHOT' TAKAHASHI

We meet the deadliest shooter in 8-bit Japan, the leader of the Famicom Generation

"When I was a young child," says the affable Takahashi Meijin (real name Toshiyuki Takahashi), "there were no TV games. We had to play with nature instead."

Born in Sapporo on Japan's northernmost main island of Hokkaido in 1959, Takahashi's existence nearly bypassed games altogether, only for another hobby of his to lead him to a local videogame company for employment: Hudson. This brought him nationwide fame and synonymy with Nintendo's Famicom, and it's no overstatement to say that Takahashi remains an icon of Eighties Japanese pop culture.

"I went to primary school and then middle school, on to senior school and then university. That's my educational background," Takahashi explains. "After that, I began to look for work. *Block Kuzushi* and *Space Invaders* were popular in Japan at that time, but my first job was as a buyer for a supermarket – nothing to do with TV games. After a while at the supermarket, I started to think that perhaps it would be better for me to work in a pachinko parlour…"

While the 'invader game' craze hit Japan with the 1978 release of Taito's *Space Invaders*, this phenomenon held only limited appeal for Takahashi. "At that point I rarely visited game centres," he tells us. "The first game I ever played was a ping-pong game that appeared just before *Block Kuzushi*. I don't remember it clearly. Anyway, I was much more interested in computers than games. Ironically, that's why I ended up joining Hudson – because of an interest in computers. After I started at Hudson I was assigned to work as a debugger on Famicom games, and it was only then that I started to think TV games were really fun, though I wasn't sure whether or not I had any great game-playing ability."

Thanks to the timing of his induction into Hudson, Takahashi witnessed – first hand and close up – the single most important console launch in videogame history. "The Famicom was released in 1983 and I had joined Hudson in 1982," he recalls. "In 1983 I switched over from the sales department to advertising and was then promoted to head of advertising, which meant I was constantly travelling back and forth between Hudson and [print publishing house] Shogakukan. In March 1985 there was a manga festival held at a department store in Ginza [an upmarket ward of Tokyo] where I had to appear on a stage as part of my PR work – that was the start of my life as Takahashi Meijin."

THIS UNLIKELY NAME change and reinvention came about as part of a prolonged PR stunt whereby each major game company had its own 'Famicom Meijin' mascot. Bandai's Famicom Meijin character was Hashimoto Meijin (real name Shinji Hashimoto); Namco had Kawano Meijin; Tecmo, Tsuji Meijin; Konami, Obana Meijin; and so on. Together these meijin – meaning 'master' or 'expert' – figures led the nation's youth in a grand Famicom gameplay education system of sorts. (Any parallels between Japan's Famicom Meijin of the Eighties and Patrick Moore in *GamesMaster* in the UK during the early-Nineties would at best be an extremely generous service to the noted astronomer.) The Famicom Meijin's remit included occasional TV appearances: they also toured regularly, leading nationwide videogame conventions attended by thousands of young players – Japan's first generation of console gamers, no less – and were involved with all manner of other PR activities. Takahashi had his own programme on TV Tokyo during 1986 and 1987, the game-centric *Takahashi Meijin's Funland*. He also appeared in TV ads for Meiji snacks, the MoonStar brand of shoes, and the Sharp-manufactured Twin Famicom console – an officially sanctioned hybrid of Nintendo's cartridge and disk systems.

> I THOUGHT TV GAMES WERE FUN. BUT I WASN'T SURE I HAD ANY GAME-PLAYING ABILITY

Videocassette walkthroughs for popular Famicom games were often presented and CONTINUED >.

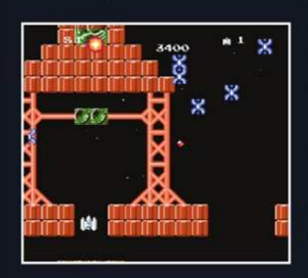






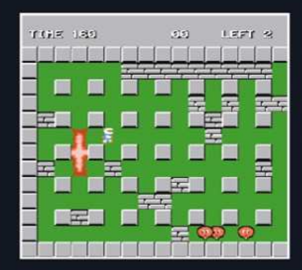
SCORE ATTACK

Takahashi Meijin reviews Famicom classics for games™ Though he's clearly a bit kinder with his scores…



STAR SOLDIER

"Thankfully this game was rated very highly. If I consider its difficulty level now, then yeah, I would have to award it a score of about 9/10. In order to achieve a hi-score, you need to really exert yourself for long periods of time – there's no relief. If you can take out the enemies as quickly as possible, their appearance speeds up and your score will also increase very quickly. It's also best to remember the patterns of how enemies arrive on the scene."



BOMBERMAN

"I'd give this game a score of 8/10. The original *Bomberman* was only a single-player game, and if you made a mistake all of the power ups you'd collected up to that point would disappear in an instant, which I thought was a bit harsh. It was especially cruel if you felt you were in a good vein of form. Anyway, I suppose it couldn't be helped that the power-up items would disappear like that, but to some extent it would have been nice if at least a couple of items could have been retained. So that's why I'm deducting points. At any rate, I think *Bomberman* should be played in a level-headed manner. You have to be able to get into the groove and then avoid trapping yourself between a block and a bomb. That's the key."



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKEN-JIMA [ADVENTURE ISLAND]

"Are you really going to let me rate this game myself? [Laughs.] It certainly doesn't surpass *Super Mario Bros*, but I would award it a score of perhaps 9/10. The most important thing in *Bouken-jima* is the timing of your jumps. When I was working as a debugger, a very long time ago, I once tried to complete this game without using any items. For the last boss on each stage, we thought you definitely needed an axe in order to win the battle, so I took it upon myself to test this theory out. In fact, I managed to get past every boss without using a single item. You do need to have an axe so that you can get rid of spiders and their webs, but apart from that I found it possible to clear the game just by mastering the parabola of my jumps."



SUPER MARIO BROS

"This isn't a Hudson game, so it's quite difficult for me to rate… but, okay, I'd say it's worth 10/10. As it's an action game, I think it's crucial that you develop your own technique if you want to advance quickly."



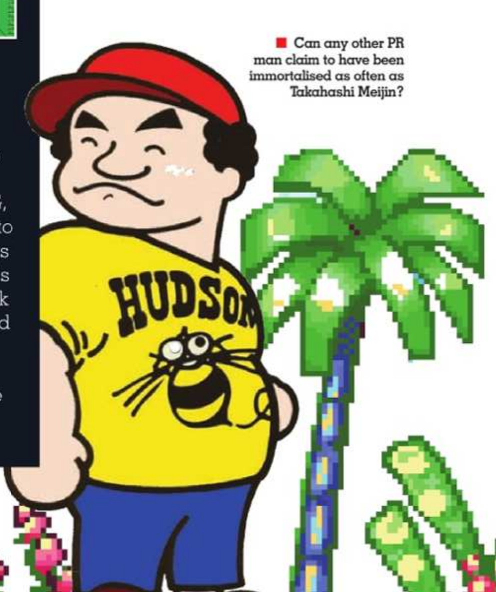
LEGEND OF ZELDA

"This is another Nintendo game, isn't it… It was a groundbreaking action RPG, so I'd give it 9/10. You have to level up properly and always keep your wits about you. It's essential to identify the weak spots in boss characters and learn how their attacks are patterned. If you play with that in mind, you'll complete the game without fail."

Happy New Year From Takahashi Meijin



IT'S PROOF OF Meijin's enduring popularity and place in Japanese folklore that, given the chance, retro game fans jump at the chance to interact with the great man. Thousands of people have signed up via Hudson's website to receive New Year's greeting cards (nenga-jo) that will apparently be sent out across Japan by Takahashi Meijin himself. He's had plenty of practice with this sort of thing, of course, having spent much of the late-Eighties signing his autograph…



Can any other PR man claim to have been immortalised as often as Takahashi Meijin?

narrated by the Meijin. In the play-guide video for Hudson's hugely popular *Ninja Hattori-kun*, which sold 1.5 million copies in Japan, Takahashi turned the whole VHS into an elongated skit, with him in full ninja 'cosplay' mode. Beyond such videos, as the most talented and charismatic Famicom Meijin, Toshiyuki Takahashi soon found himself starring in a short film called *Game King Takahashi Meijin Vs Mouri Meijin Clash! The Great Battle* (see The Original Videogame Movie). And as if that wasn't enough of an unlikely high for this one-time supermarket employee from the distant north of Japan, Takahashi even went on to record a series of game-related singles. He sang songs mostly on the subject of playing Famicom games and had his first single released in April 1986, an emphatic technopop *Star Soldier*-themed ditty called *Runner*. The B-side, a track called *Fighter*, was used as the background music in the aforementioned *Ninja Hattori-kun* advice video.

Incidentally, Takahashi's uniquely punchy singing style apparently developed thanks to his fascination with the songs of Yosui Inoue Japan's equivalent of Bob Dylan. Whenever he visited karaoke during his tenure as a supermarket employee, he would sing Yosui Inoue material almost exclusively. Takahashi released six singles and two albums via a major Japanese label between 1986 and 1988. Many of these releases charted in Japan, and Takahashi looks back on his brief singing career with fondness: "During junior and senior school I used to play guitar and sing, so even from that early stage one of my objectives in life was to put out a record at some point. Even though it was only thanks to becoming Takahashi Meijin that I had the chance to do that, I was really happy to be able to realise my dream. It was a great experience for me."

Takahashi surely couldn't have envisaged how his career would spiral into Japanese pop culture. Even today, he's modest to a fault. How does it feel to be a celebrity, we ask? "I'm not a celebrity," he laughs. (He is, really.) In part, this modesty is down to what seems like embarrassment on Takahashi's part – but it's more likely a case of him honestly wanting to avoid undue fuss. When the whole Famicom Meijin thing kicked off, his first inclination was to keep his alter-ego hidden from his friends and family. "I initially tried to keep it a secret from them," he smiles. "When my family inevitably found out about me being Takahashi Meijin, they all had plenty to say about it, but everyone was happy with it. Occasionally, when I went to visit my grandmother she'd have a stack of a hundred or so cards from friends and people who knew I was her grandson, and I had to autograph the lot of them. That was always quite a chore…"

One of Takahashi's most notable achievements was a 16-shots-per-second rate of joypad button mashing, which was quite rightly celebrated and even earned him a snappy nickname. "I had no special training for this," he explains. "During the summer holidays of 1985 we held game conventions all around the country – these events were called All-Japan Caravan Famicom Conventions – but at that time I wasn't yet making any claims about my ability to perform 16-shot rapid fire."

Competitive gaming can be a painful pursuit. Some people clearly can't handle the pressure.

IN STAR SOLDIER IT'S ACTUALLY POSSIBLE TO UNLEASH TWO SHOTS SIMULTANEOUSLY

A few months after his skills became public knowledge and '16-shot' became a buzz-term in playgrounds all over Japan, Hudson's designers worked to implement what had become an iconic number into the company's upcoming *Star Soldier* game. A special 'Takahashi Meijin 16-Shot' item was coded into the game, enabling players to precisely replicate Takahashi's quickshot skills via auto-fire. Elsewhere, the Lazaro boss could be defeated with exactly 16 shots if the player managed to hit the boss before its four parts became joined together, resulting in a bonus score of 80,000 points. "In *Star Soldier* it's actually possible to unleash two shots simultaneously," Takahashi mentions, "so you could defeat the boss in a split second with CONTINUED >.

Before and after. Takashi Meijin's *Adventure Island* persona, from the NES to the SNES.



16SHOT TV

FOR THE PAST few months, Takahashi Meijin has been producing his own online TV programme called *16SHOT TV*, in which the legendary joypad gymnast shows viewers how to beat the hell out of Hudson's latest games. You'll notice that his current look is at odds with the photos on these pages: follicle-related challenges are often trickier to defeat than videogame bosses. 16SHOT TV can be enjoyed at www.16shot.jp/tv – no Japanese skills necessary.





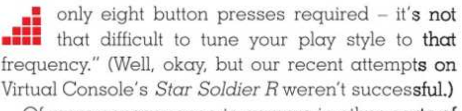
■ Japanese kids were so eager to master Takahashi's 16-shot method that Hudson released a digital toy to test gamers' personal finger tapping frequencies.

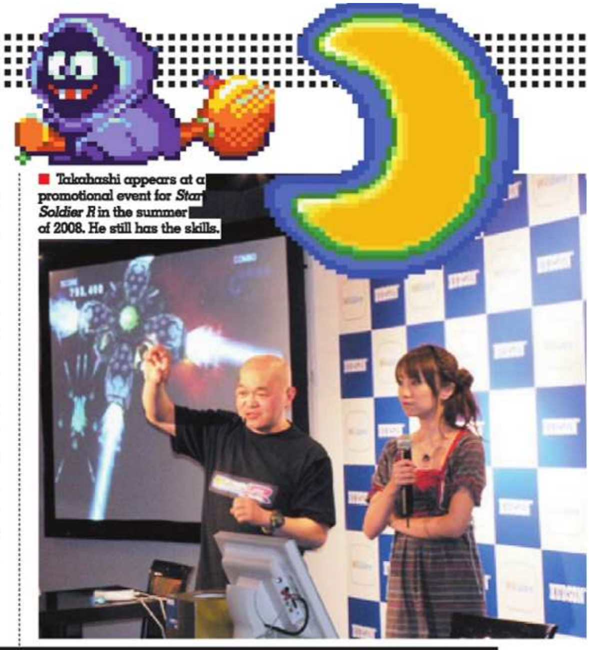
only eight button presses required – it's not that difficult to tune your play style to that frequency." (Well, okay, but our recent attempts on Virtual Console's *Star Soldier R* weren't successful.)

Of more consequence to gamers in other parts of the world was Takahashi's starring role in the million-selling *Takahashi Meijin No Bouken-jima*, which was later exported from Japan as *Adventure Island*. "I had no idea I would become a TV game character," Takahashi exclaims. "I hadn't even thought of the possibility… I was really happy when *Bouken-jima* was released. The look of my character was just a version of the original *Wonderboy* design but with the face changed. Thankfully, the designer was a really skilled individual and as soon as I saw the *Takahashi Meijin* character I felt satisfied with what had been produced."

The first game in the series (see Mr Meijin's Videogame Chronology) was a Famicom adaptation of Sega's *Wonderboy* PCB, a solid platformer that was a bit too unforgiving for Takahashi's liking: "*Bouken-jima* was based on an arcade videogame, which is why it's quite difficult. Thinking about it now, I should really have suggested to Hudson that the game be made a bit easier to play…"

In spite of his image as Japan's most able gamer, Takahashi took a contrary stance to remind Japan's youth that there was more to life than Famicom cassettes and hi-scores. He constructed the catchphrase 'Famicom ha ichi-nichi ichi-jikan' – in other words, 'Play Famicom one hour a day'. It turns out this was something he suggested spontaneously, off the cuff, but it stuck and is even remembered in Japan today. Takahashi explains: "On the Fukuoka leg of the 1985 National Famicom Caravan tour, I just decided to tell the crowds 'Playing TV games for about an hour is a good idea. Let's play outside more, eh?' It was just a message I came up with. Of course, I'm an employee of a game company, and the company had to decide whether or not my comments were discouraging people from playing games. But as far as I'm concerned, one hour is about the right length of time to play TV games. If I play for longer than that, I begin to lose my concentration."





■ Takahashi appears at a promotional event for *Star Soldier R* in the summer of 2008. He still has the skills.

I HAD NO IDEA I WOULD BECOME A TV GAME CHARACTER. I HADN'T EVEN THOUGHT OF IT

Takahashi seems genuine, giving the impression of loving life and games more than any notion of celebrity that may have attached itself to him. "I think that to have so many experiences as Takahashi Meijin is a really wonderful thing. Sometimes I was so busy that I would board planes four times a day, but even such times left me with great memories."

Takahashi is still employed by Hudson today, and apparently doesn't commute by plane quite so often but remains based in Sapporo. He makes annual appearances on Hudson's event stage at the Tokyo Game Show and never fails to attract a crowd of visibly entertained onlookers. He's also appeared as a guest in recent series of Japan's superb *Game Center CX* retro game challenge programme. He's even enjoyed a minor revival of his musical career in recent years, supplying guest vocal tracks for a couple of songs by Japan's excellent YMCK technopop outfit and releasing a new single of his own to celebrate Famicom's twentieth anniversary in 2003. His taste in games appears to have moved away from shoot-'em-ups and platformers – "These days I mostly prefer to play puzzle games," he says – but he's still full of enthusiasm for Hudson's output and clearly hasn't lost any of his PR skills. Take it away, Takahashi: "The game I'm most into at the moment is *Job Island* on Wii. It's a compilation of 50 mini-games and I have a lot of fun playing them, but it's also enjoyable to watch how other people play *Job Island*." Of course, what we're really hoping for now is a new *Adventure Island*…





Battle Of The Meijins

The Original Videogame Movie

■ **IT'S QUASI-FAMOUS IN Japan, but most people in the West have never heard of it. In the first instance of a videogame confrontation hitting the big screen, *Game King Takahashi Meijin Vs Mouri Meijin Clash! The Great Battle* preceded *King Of Kong* by some 20 years. Mouri Meijin was a freelance Famicom Meijin who variously worked for softcos such as Hudson, Namco, Konami and Bandai. And Takahashi Meijin was Mr Hudson – Bomberman and Star Soldier through and through. In fact, the film centres on a competition between the two Meijin to see who will be victorious in the *Star Soldier* stakes – you can guess who won – with Hudson's classic shoot-'em-up having been released just a month before this half-hour-long film debuted.**





MR MEIJIN'S VIDEOGAME CHRONOLOGY

Takahashi Meijin may actually have appeared in more videogames than any other real-life person. Unless you count Mark Hamill…



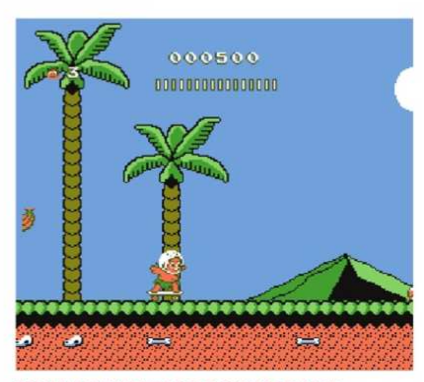
TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKEN-JIMA
ADVENTURE ISLAND (Famicom 1986, NES 1988)

■ *Bouken-jima*, now available via VC and also as part of the Famicom Mini series of GBA releases, was released on GC and PS2 in updated form in 2003 in Japan. In the West, as *Adventure Island*, the unknown Takahashi Meijin was replaced with the even more anonymous Master Higgins.



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BUG-TTE HONEY
(Famicom 1987)

■ Not part of the *Adventure Island/Bouken-jima* series, but nevertheless featuring Takahashi Meijin, this sort-of spin-off pitched our man in the world of then-popular Japanese anime *Bug-tte Honey*. The game is half *Adventure Island*-style platformer, half *Arkanoid*-clone. An odd match.



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKEN-JIMA II/
ADVENTURE ISLAND II
(Famicom/NES 1991, GB 1992)

■ The superior sequel to *Bouken-jima* arrived too late to capitalise on the first game's million sales in Japan, and with the advent of Super Famicom, Takahashi's role had diminished slightly.



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKEN-JIMA III/
ADVENTURE ISLAND 3
(Famicom/NES 1992, GB 1993)

■ *Adventure Island 3* was a case of more of the same. By this stage the series was in dire need of a fresh lick of paint, and it was about to receive it…



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO SHIN BOUKEN-JIMA/
NEW ADVENTURE ISLAND
(PCE/TG16 1992)

■ *Shin Bouken-jima* marked the series' and Takahashi Meijin's debut on PC-Engine, a format that Hudson supported until its demise in the mid-Nineties. Now available on VC, ironically enough.



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO DAI BOUKEN-JIMA/
SUPER ADVENTURE ISLAND (Super Famicom/SNES 1992)

■ Arguably the best *Bouken-jima* game, Takahashi Meijin's transportation to the Super Famicom brought far superior graphics and an excellent soundtrack from Yuzo Koshiro, who also did the music for Sega's *Streets Of Rage*.



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKEN-JIMA IV
(Famicom 1994)

■ The last 8-bit Famicom cassette officially released in Japan, 1994's *Bouken-jima IV* introduced an adventure game style reminiscent of later *Wonderboy* titles and, in some odd way, of *Legend Of Zelda II*. A curio, but not quite a classic.



TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO DAI BOUKEN-JIMA II/
SUPER ADVENTURE ISLAND II
(Super Famicom/SNES 1995)

■ This, the most recent original *Bouken-jima* entry, was released 14 years ago and built on the platforming-lite formula of the final Famicom title. As and when a sequel appears, we hope it sticks to the platforming goodness of earlier games.

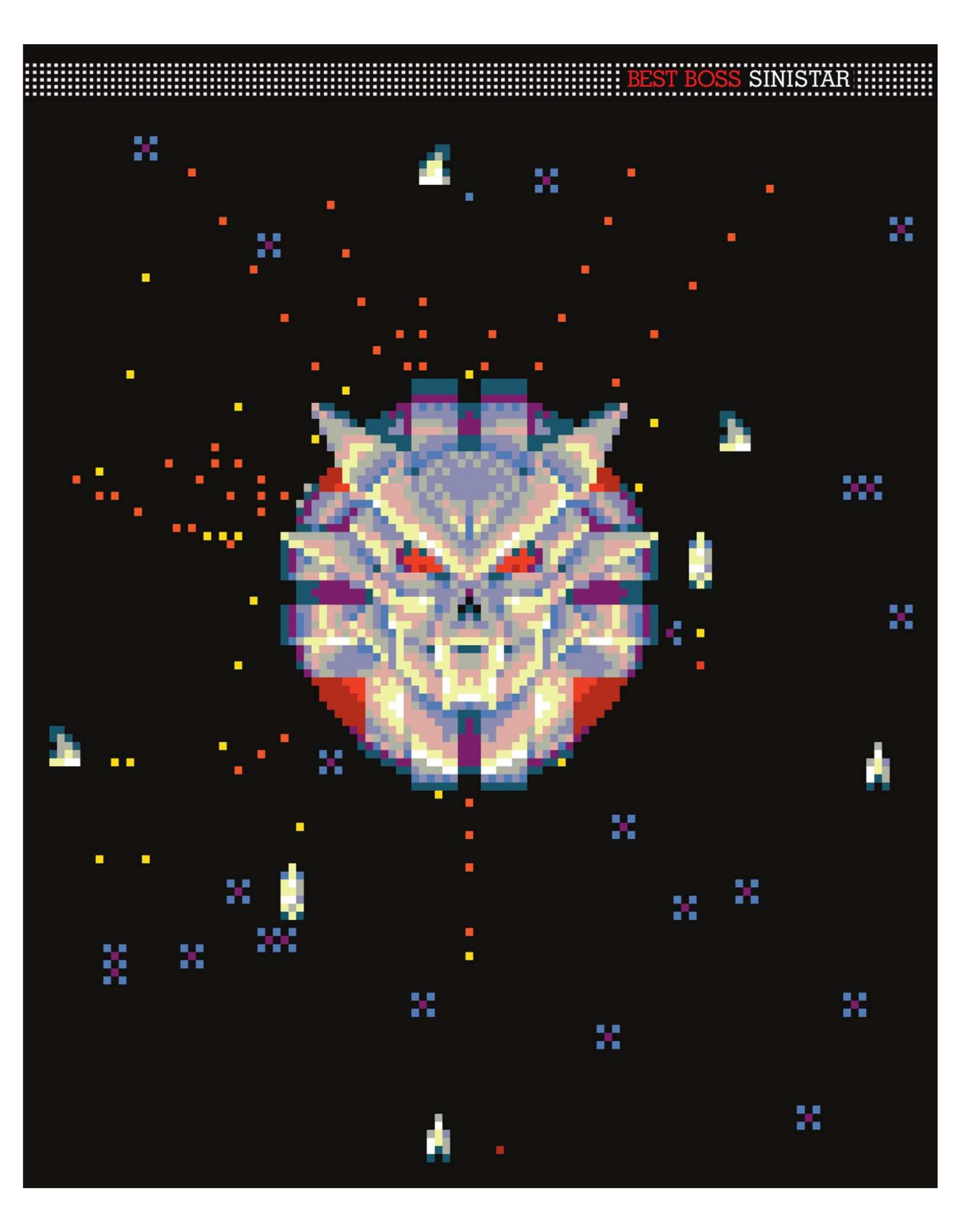




SINISTAR Arcade [Williams] 1983

IF YOU like your videogame bosses to be big, mean and scary then they don't come much bigger, meaner, or scarier than *Sinistar*. He might not look like much on paper, but trust us, he'll have you quivering on the spot the first time he comes after you. Appearing in the arcade game of the same name, *Sinistar* is slowly constructed by little worker spaceships as you fly around mining asteroids for bomb parts. And when the hulking great star of steel is complete you'll be made aware by a booming off-screen voice announcing "I live" before he homes in on your location sucks you up and chews you to bits. Terrifying.




BEST BOSS SINISTAR



BEHIND THE SCENES

SECRET OF EVERMORE

Square's first US-made RPG is one that many have dismissed but few have actually played. Join us as we attempt to rehabilitate the status of one of 16-bit gaming's most underrated role-playing titles



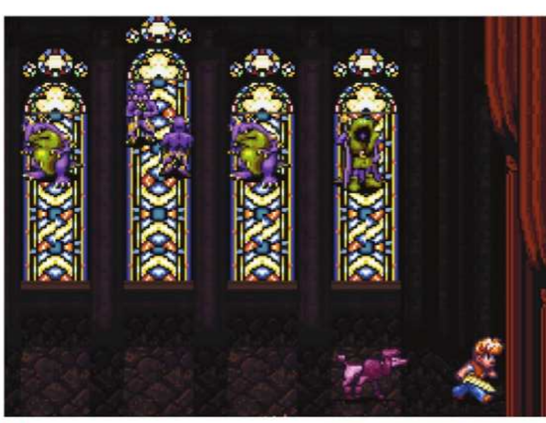
Released: 1995
Format: Super Nintendo
Publisher: Squaresoft
Developer: Squaresoft USA

KEY STAFF:
Doug Smith (director)
Brian Fehdrau (lead programmer)
Daniel Dociu (character design and illustration)
Jeremy Soule (music)



THEY SAY THAT hell hath no fury like a fanboy scorned, and when RPG specialist Square announced its first American-made role-playing title, the reaction from some sections of the gaming public was hostile to say the least. The reason for this vitriol was Square's apparent ignorance of its own series. *Seiken Densetsu 2* had been localised for the Western market as *Secret Of Mana* in 1994 and gained a cult following desperate to experience future instalments, but despite the availability of a sequel in Japan in the form of *Seiken Densetsu 3*, no confirmation of an English-language version was forthcoming. In October 1995 when Square released *Secret Of Evermore* – the aforementioned RPG of US origin – fans came up with their own explanation for the lack of a Western *Secret Of Mana 2*: the company's time had been unfairly consumed producing this new pretender.

In this respect, Square's first Western-developed RPG couldn't have had a more difficult genesis, but as is often the case, the truth is a different matter entirely. Keen to get to the bottom of the story and re-assess one of the most significant adventure titles of the 16-bit era, we got in touch with the lead programmer on *Secret Of Evermore*, Brian Fehdrau. A fresh-faced college graduate when he approached Squaresoft's Redmond HQ back in the early-Nineties, Fehdrau's career in the videogame industry nearly didn't happen. "I was looking for work having just graduated from college in Canada with a degree in computer science sitting on a stack of student loans," he recalls with a wince. "For six months, I sent resumes to every computer-related company I could find, to no avail. About a week before my money would have run out – and I would have had to get a considerably less fulfilling job to pay the rent – I got a last-minute CONTINUED >.



Your dog helped locate components for alchemy and predated the canine assistant in Lionhead Studio's *Fable II* by more than a decade.





A WEEK BEFORE MY MONEY WOULD HAVE RUN OUT I GOT A CALL FROM SQUARESOFT







■ The cast of characters in *Evermore* are quite unlike any you've seen in any other Square-made RPG. This probably didn't endear the game to hardcore devotees of the company.





■ The silky-smooth Mode 7 rotation capabilities of the SNES were put to good use in these flying sections.







■ In this scene our plucky hero appears to be up a certain creek without a paddle.



Posted by:
RADIOFLOYD

I played it briefly not so long ago just to get a taste of it and I have to say I was mighty impressed. The art style is striking. It just felt like nothing else I've played. Great sense of humour as well. Peter Molyneux has obviously played it – the dog mechanic from *Fable II* is ripped straight out of it.

Posted by:
BOB SYKO

I loved it, loved the style, loved the settings, but there was one thing I didn't love and that was the difficulty. There I was, happily playing away for a few hours when I get to some bad guy with a bony rib cage thing going on and what happens? I die. A lot. I eventually got past it, but by then I had lost all enthusiasm for a game that was clearly going to be mean to me for the next 30 hours or so. Such a shame there was no two-player mode

Posted by:
GHOSTSTALKER

What I really liked about the game was the inventory system. Things were so simple back then. You had to juggle your equipment because you couldn't move. I did find the dialogue slightly annoying though: 'hey look, a mummy… a chainsaw… and a balloon animal'. But that's probably because I have grown accustomed to speech in games.

Posted by:
SAKURAGEN

Great game. It's just kind of unfortunate that I got this at the same time as I got *Terranigma*, which was soooooo much better and took up all of my time.



End-of-level guardian Thraxx posed a stern challenge to RPG newcomers, and Fehdrau believes it may have put people off the game.

call from Squaresoft. I had caught their eye due to my experience hacking Assembly language on the Commodore 64, whose CPU is a predecessor to the one found in the SNES."

At this point, Square's US division was merely concerned with the logistics of distribution, but the fact that it was rapidly starting to acquire programming talent was a sign that things were about to change. "Squaresoft was initially just the American arm of the company that distributed the games made by its Japanese parent Square Co Ltd," Fehdrau explains. "It was situated in a small office with probably a dozen or so people who did marketing and ran the attached warehouse. Suddenly they were tasked with hiring a new development team and creating something based on Western stories instead of Eastern. On a macro level, a plan was given to us – make an American *Secret Of Mana* – and we were to flesh out the details as we saw fit."

TO BE BRUTALLY HONEST, I HADN'T EVEN HEARD OF SQUARE BEFORE I WORKED THERE

FEHDRAU'S EXPERIENCE EARNED him the position of lead programmer, but ironically his knowledge of Square's output was scant. "To be brutally honest, I hadn't even heard of Square before I worked there," he admits somewhat sheepishly. "*The Legend Of Zelda* on NES was the limit of my console RPG experience, but I had played many computer-based RPGs over the years and was already a huge fan of the genre." Despite his relative ignorance of his employer's past exploits, Fehdrau soon settled in and found himself hopelessly addicted to the very game that he and his co-workers would be attempting to emulate. "*Secret Of Mana* was my first exposure to Square's own stuff, and I thought it was absolutely awesome," he comments. "I played it through in my first week or so working for Squaresoft and really enjoyed it, and I still look back on that week fondly. It was such a nicely rendered world, with good game mechanics, an innovative interface, and a pretty long storyline with a little more substance than the usual 'OMG so-and-so's been kidnapped' affair that most RPGs seem to have."

The instructions from Square HQ in Japan were clear. "Make it like *Mana*. Use Western themes. Don't take forever doing it. Don't suck," recites Fehdrau with a grin. However, short of these key aims, the staff at Redmond were left largely to their own devices. "They let us have free rein with artistic and creative direction, and let us do things how we wished on the technical side," says Fehdrau. "The idea was that we would use fictional B-movies as the theme of the game so that we could always make up something that suited the situation, something we wouldn't get sued over, and something that would reinforce

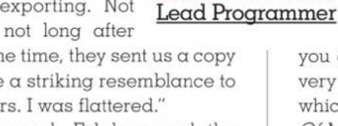
Nobody Here But Us Chickens

EVERMORE'S DEVELOPMENT TEAM wasn't afraid to fly in the face of convention when it came to RPG clichés, as the infamous 'Chicken Code' proves. "Like most other NPCs, if you walk up to a chicken in the market and press the button, it'll respond," explains Fehdrau. "As I recall, it makes sort of a startled clucking sound. Now, I don't remember why – I think I was sitting there one day, hammering on the button out of boredom and making a total racket with the sound effect – but I decided that it would not please the gods for someone to taunt the poor chickens like that. So I put on my God of Chickens hat, wrote a little code, and now if you have the nerve to bother them too much you will be warned to stop. If you disregard the warning you'll regret it."



the overall theme of a campy adventure." Despite the very precise orders, assistance from Square Japan was practically non-existent. "Our code, both for the game and the tools, was written entirely from scratch by us, and likewise for all design, levels, artwork, music and so on," explains Fehdrau, dispelling one widespread falsehood that has grown up around the game. "The common belief that we inherited the *Mana* engine and threw different content into it is incorrect," he continues. "We borrowed a ton of ideas from their games of course, but the implementation was all new. We did get occasional help in non-dev areas – not to mention all the money that paid our salaries – but we basically made our own way with the game itself. There were pluses and minuses to this hands-off approach, but I'm pretty sure I liked it way more than I would have liked the alternative."

■■■ WITH NO TECHNICAL help forthcoming from Japan, Square's US team created its own tools in order to get the job done. "At heart, Square's Amazing Graphical Editor, or 'SAGE' for short – I had a thing for acronyms – was basically a Mac GUI application that could create or import image tiles, collect them into sets, and then pick from the sets to cobble together levels, characters and effects," reveals Fehdrau. "Everything you see on the screen in *Evermore* was set up in SAGE and exported directly to ROM format from it. SAGE attempted to be 'what you see is what you get' on the computer side, but also had the ability to download maps or animations to a test kit, allowing artists to test their work on a real TV. That was important since a TV and a computer monitor have rather different colour spaces. Brown on a monitor is orange on a TV, for instance. In hindsight, the 'be everything to everyone' nature of the program made it cumbersome at times, especially when exporting. Not everyone adored it, but not long after Square Japan visited us one time, they sent us a copy of an application that bore a striking resemblance to what I'd shown them of ours. I was flattered."



BRIAN FEHDRAU
Lead Programmer

As development progressed, Fehdrau and the rest of the team at Square USA were bursting with innovative ideas, and the alchemy system in *Secret Of Evermore* is a good example of a development group thinking outside the box. "I remember lots of meetings, going over lots of ideas for magic, and I think we even implemented about half a dozen,"



■ Would you go to the cinema to see *The Lost Adventures Of Vexx*? We wouldn't, that's for sure.

remembers Fehdrau. "We eventually drifted toward something with components. I think it appealed partially because it was a somewhat novel idea and, in my opinion, partially because everyone at heart really likes to collect things. Luckily, it also gave your dog helper another thing to do. Really though, I think the choice was pretty arbitrary, what really mattered was that we executed it well. I think the concept could just as easily be done poorly with only a few minor differences. We had some pretty clever people on staff who understood what sucks and what's fun, and I think they got that alchemy right."

But for all of the team's ebullience and industry, there were elements that wound up on the cutting-room floor. "It was a huge mistake to leave out multiplayer, in my opinion," laments Fehdrau. "I suspect I'm the one who decided not to do it, so you can blame me if you like. It was a scary thing, very apt to cause 'stuck player' bugs and such, which you may be familiar with if you played *Secret Of Mana* in multiplayer. We, or possibly I, decided to play it safe and not do it. I feel bad about that. Lots of people would have had fun playing with friends."

With things starting to fall into place, there was the small matter of the soundtrack to consider. Square's games have a reputation for high levels of musical excellence, and thankfully *Secret Of* CONTINUED >.





>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

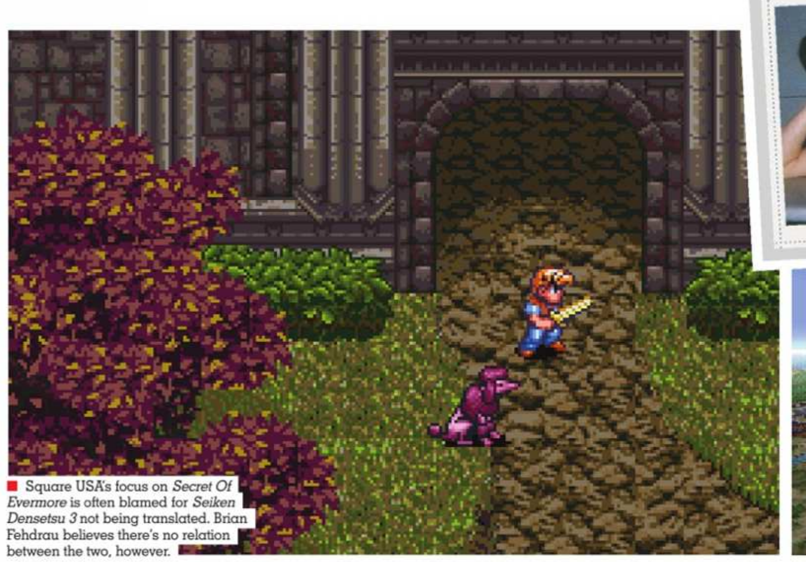


Essentially the blueprint for *Evermore, Secret Of Mana* is a classic Japanese RPG that is still eminently playable even today.



Though *Shadow Madness* copies *FF VII*, if it weren't for *Evermore* it's unlikely this US developed RPG would have been made at all.





Square USA's focus on *Secret Of Evermore* is often blamed for *Seiken Densetsu 3* not being translated. Brian Fehdrau believes there's no relation between the two, however.

①Brian J. Fehdrau
②4.5③93.7.12
④I am a fish.
⑤Game Programmer

Fehdrau: "Here's my entry in the 1994 Square Times yearbook, which Square Japan put together. The text corresponds to numbered questions: 1) name, 2) birthday, 3) hire date, 4) interesting info about you, 5) position. And my hand is on a can of Spam because that was our team's mascot. We were called Team Spam. Not, in retrospect, the best team name ever."





Evermore was no exception, despite not having a renowned Japanese composer at the helm. The man responsible was Jeremy Soule, who got his job at Squaresoft by sending in demos. "He made these amazing orchestral pieces and sent them on digital audio tape," recalls Fehdrau. "I have this memory of people trying to figure out how we could get something to play them on. It didn't take much to realise he was a genius and ought to be snapped up ASAP, so we did."

Although the game has an undeniably American feel to it – as was Square's intention – those with a proclivity for classic British cartoons may spot a very subtle reference. "I was a fan of *Count Duckula*," explains Fehdrau. "It was a silly series, but it always tickled me. In the pilot episode, there are these burglars trying to break into Duckula's castle. On a couple of occasions, they fall while scaling a wall, and despite being evenly spaced on the rope, there's a big gap between the sound of the henchmen hitting the ground and the sound of the leader hitting the ground. It was subtle humour, which appealed to me, and when I scripted a scene of someone falling through the floors of a castle in *Evermore*, I timed the crashes similarly. One of my friends got the reference without being told, but I never thought anyone else would."

I GENUINELY HAD NO IDEA THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO LIKED EVERMORE SO MUCH

THE MONTHS ROLLED by and the team rushed to get the game ready for release – Fehdrau even skipped his honeymoon in order to finish off the code – and Square's first American-made RPG was pushed onto store shelves in 1995. Sadly, despite some positive reviews, its commercial performance was less than remarkable. Fehdrau has his own take on why this was the case. "There were three strikes against us, especially with Square fans in the West," he explains. "First, we didn't make a Japanese mythology game. Second, we were thought to be making our game instead of translating some Japanese games people really wanted to see. And third, there were points of real frustration – particularly one early on when you fight the boss Thraxx – that probably put a bad taste in people's mouths before they had a chance to see some of the things we had done right. I wouldn't say the cards were stacked against us, but boy, points one and two were hard for us to prevail against."

Indeed, the theory that *Evermore* was favoured over a potential Western version of *Seiken Densetsu 3* has continued to dog the game since it was announced. But was *Evermore* responsible for *Secret Of Mana 2* never seeing the light of day on Western shores? Is there any truth in this accusation? "None at all," replies Fehdrau, without a moment of hesitation. "The people on our team never had anything to do with translations. That was all done by people outside the team, who had

Expanding The Adventure

The expansion port that never was…

IF FEHDRAU AND his team had their way, *Evermore's* quest would have continued way past the end credits. Plans were afoot to give the game an expansion port where new content – stored on miniature cartridges – could be inserted at a later date. "We were thinking in terms of episodic content, limited in scope, fairly cheap to make, and fairly cheap to purchase," says Fehdrau. "Think impulse buys – like iTunes but without the internet. It was interesting but I don't think anyone could guarantee a market for the sub-carts, or that Nintendo would even let us do it. In the end, it just quietly went away. Looking back on it, it was probably a good thing, as the technical complication would have been significant and the SNES market also tanked not too long after we shipped, so it would have been a waste of time and effort."



What They Said...



"The game definitely echoes Square quality and for that reason I consider it a success, especially for the first time out. It's promising just seeing a well-made US RPG. SOE is definitely worthy of a sequel"

Diehard GameFan, Vol 3 Issue 11

been working for the company since before we were hired. In fact, there were several translations done during the development of *Evermore*, and ironically it was actually us that stopped what we were doing each time to pitch in and playtest them, not the other way around. I think *Breath Of Fire*, *Chrono Trigger*, and *Final Fantasy III* (AKA *Final Fantasy VI*) were all translated during our time on *Evermore*. The choice not to translate *Seiken Densetsu 3* was made overseas by the parent company in Japan, for undisclosed reasons of their own. I've made speculations as to why, but honestly, I don't have or know any official reason; I just know it wasn't for lack of resources on our end."

THE GAME'S POOR commercial performance had ramifications for Square's American arm, despite the fact that what it had produced was excellent for a first attempt. "I think Square was worried that we'd tarnish the brand if we did any more games," explains Fehdrau. "They cut their losses with us in order to concentrate on the new LA studio, which was doing more traditional stuff. I wasn't happy, of course, but I don't think I'd have done any differently in their shoes. To their credit, they gave us pretty nice severance packages." Fehdrau was lucky enough to find another job immediately, working for Boss Game Studios. He now plies his trade for Amaze Entertainment – part of the Foundation 9 group, which includes emulation experts Digital Eclipse/Backbone Entertainment. "I work there as chief engineer on Amaze's in-house multiplatform console game engine, doing all sorts of bare-metal-style programming, though probably more graphics than anything else," he reveals.

Thankfully, *Evermore* has undergone something of a re-evaluation among Square fans. "I've been surprised," admits Fehdrau. "When I discovered the fan base a few years ago, I was still living with the memories of being panned for the various reasons I mentioned earlier. I genuinely had no idea there were people who liked *Evermore* so much, never mind loved it. I played it again myself, and once I got past the frustrating bits, I really enjoyed it. It was a real revelation, and I felt stupid for having been ashamed of the game for so long. I've finally stopped responding to, 'Oh, you worked on *Evermore*?' with 'Ah yeah, sorry about that'. It took a long time to believe that people were saying they liked it because they liked it, and not because they were being polite."

Ultimately, Fehdrau has grown to be immensely – and justifiably – proud of the work he and his fellow co-workers did on the game. "I think we did a great job with the engine, considering that we were mimicking one of the finest action RPGs made to date then, with not a lick of source code, and a brand new team of programmers, most of whom were new to the industry," he says. "However, that's not very interesting to most people. Of what you can see, I think it's the breadth of the game that I was impressed with when I played it a few years ago. I knew it was big, but honestly, during development, you don't ever play a game all the way through. That was my first time. It was big – bigger than I thought we'd had time to make, with rich environments and lots of variety and things to do. It actually stood up pretty well after all those years, rather than being some briefly interesting, but ultimately forgettable flash in the pan."



Secret Of Evermore isn't nearly as bad as some would have you believe, but it could have been better too. Lack of multiplayer was a real killer.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Your monthly guide to collectable retro treasures



DETAILS

FORMAT: CD-i
YEAR: 1995
PUBLISHER: Philips
DEVELOPER: Viridis Corporation
EXPECT TO PAY: £100-£150

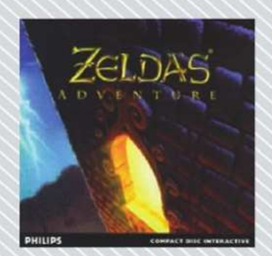


EXHIBIT A: 1UP.com voted this one of the 15 worst covers of all time, and it's easy to see why. It's just a window!

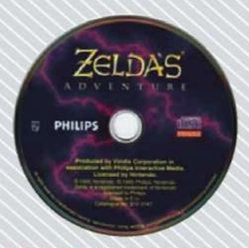


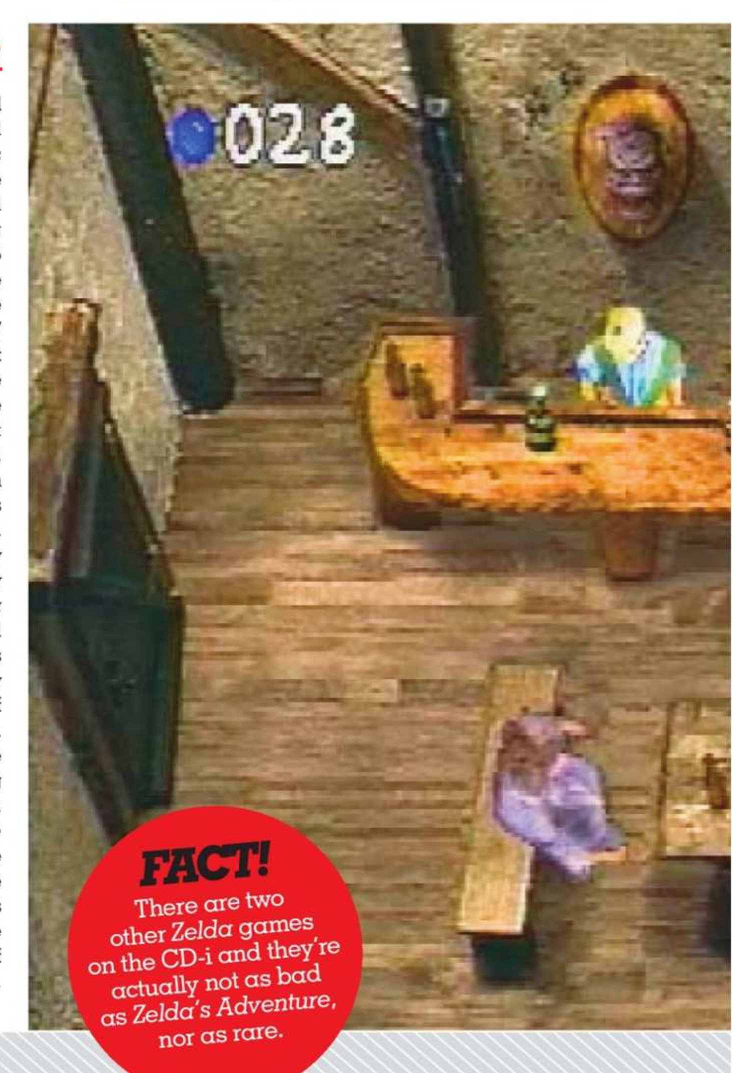
EXHIBIT B: Here's the CD-ROM in all its glory. Treasure it and try not to scratch its rare and precious surface.

ZELDA'S ADVENTURE

If you'd like games™ to feature you and your prized possession in Collector's Corner, email us at retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Why It's Rare

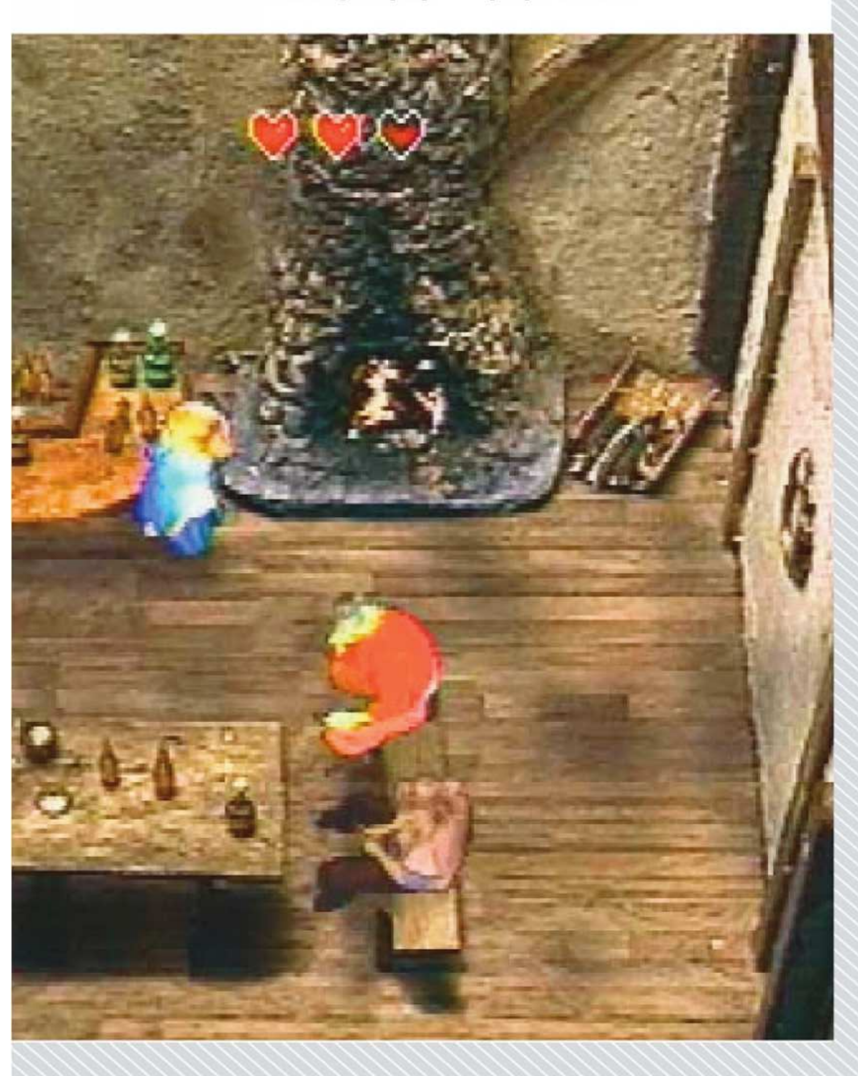
AS THE THIRD and final game in Philips' much-derided and often-forgotten *Zelda* trilogy, *Zelda's Adventure* arrived very late in the life of the CD-i. Having suffered numerous difficulties during development and a staggering two years in beta testing, the game hit the shelves at a point when the commercial viability of Philips' six-year-old console was all but dead. Needless to say, the game was produced in conservative numbers, and although it hit bargain bin prices within months, the collector's price has risen greatly in the 14 years since thanks to the unusual nature of the game. As a *Zelda* game not made by Nintendo, the disc is definitely of interest. But as the only *Zelda* game to be made using digitised graphics, live-action cut-scenes and voice acting, and as the only one that puts you in control of Princess Zelda herself, it is unique. These unusual qualities, and the game's near-mythical status among devotees of kitsch retro curiosities, have elevated *Zelda's Adventure* to a place beyond rarity. It is the sort of game that has become a status symbol for collectors interested in the novelty of notable failures. And there are plenty of those collectors around…



FACT! There are two other *Zelda* games on the CD-i and they're actually not as bad as *Zelda's Adventure*, nor as rare.

Worth Playing?

IF THE YEAR was 1995 and we were reviewing *Zelda's Adventure* as part of an objective buyer's guide then there's no way we could honestly recommend it. The game is bad beyond all belief. A real sign of the worst that CD-ROM had to offer at the time, it assumes that digitised graphics are the best form of representation, since they're obviously the most 'real'. And it tries to wow us with live-action FMV but neglects to use professional actors or cinematographers to do the job. The results are embarrassingly bad and actually have an adverse effect on the gameplay too. The digitised backgrounds took up so much memory space that they slowed the CD-i to a crawl and made scrolling so juddery that the game was rendered unplayable. There is something about a game that bad, though, especially when it comes under the umbrella of the usually excellent, often genre-defining, *Zelda* series. To experience a *Zelda* game so bad that Nintendo has omitted it from its own history books is a tempting prospect indeed. Tempting enough to spend over £100, though? We don't think so. But there are plenty of other people who do.





I'VE GOT ONE

Name: **Thomas Anthony**
Occupation: **Server Engineer**

Why collect CD-i games and what drew you to *Zelda's Adventure* in particular?
I never could afford a CD-i in the early Nineties when they cost £499.99 plus £179.99 for the DV cart, but I always wanted one so I could play arcade conversions such as *Dragon's Lair* and *Mad Dog McCree*, which, at the time, were only available on the 3DO, Mega-CD and PC and were nowhere near as good. About seven years ago, I decided to buy a CD-i 220 and received about 70 movies and games with it. Even though the games aren't amazing compared to other systems of the time, they still play very well, possibly due to the memories I had of the console in the early Nineties. Since then I've tried to obtain a complete CD-i collection and, because of this, I bought *Zelda's Adventure* very recently.

Tell us how you found the game.
I purchased my copy of *Zelda's Adventure* from eBay UK. Recently, there always seem to be copies available, even though most of the time the game goes for a lot of money.

What condition was the game in and how much did you pay for it?
The condition of my game is excellent. Including delivery I paid £70, which I'm okay with because I've seen copies sell for £180 recently. I know for a fact, though, that in Holland you can probably pick this game up for one tenth of that figure.

Have you actually played *Zelda's Adventure* and, if so, what do you think of it?
I don't really have time to play any games at all. I have a 360 and PS3, which get some use, but none of my other games leave storage. My plan is/was to build a games room and play the games I own, but that's yet to happen.

Finally, would you ever consider selling the game or is it yours for life?
If the game went up in value and I needed the cash I would sell it. After all, it's only a game.



MARIO
027350

×14

NINTENDON'T



Nintendo isn't evil. Nor is it the beneficent saint pictured in its adverts. It's a business. Could we be its disposable assets?

Like all great antagonists, Nintendo wasn't born of malevolence or intent on savage domination. Even now it remains what it always was: a successful, necessarily cut-throat and dogmatically shrewd business. Success first came for the struggling hanafuda playing-card manufacturer when yakuza adopted the decks for their high-stakes gambling. Players demanded a brand new pack at the beginning of every game, and it fell to Nintendo Koppai's founder, Fusajiro Yamauchi, to supply. By 1907 he was in prime position to expand his business and became the first domestic Japanese manufacturer of Western-style playing cards. The demand for these was equally high, prompting the astute entrepreneur to join forces with the insalubriously titled Japan Tobacco & Salt Corporation to achieve countrywide market penetration. But corporate growth is a fickle mistress and only the resolute can survive her cold touch.

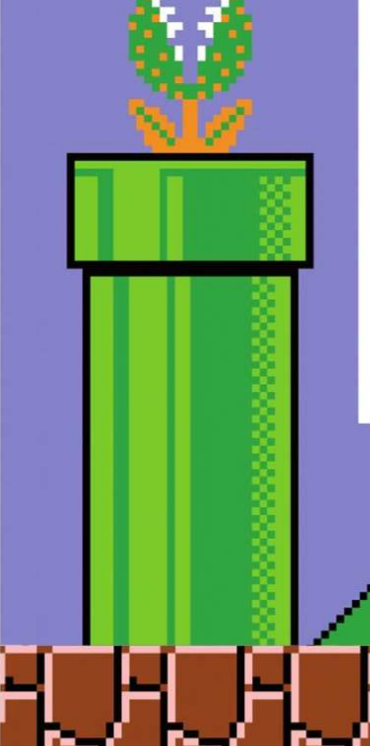
Filial piety has always been important to the Japanese, and this is an image promoted by Nintendo ever since its first console hit the market. Yet over the years there's been a distinctly divergent message from within the heart of the corporation. Not always bathing in the warm glow of the global authority it enjoys today, the growth of the company has seen its fair share of dubious practice.

When Fusajiro retired, Nintendo Koppai was taken over by Sekiryo Kaneda, who adopted his father-in-law's surname after an arranged marriage to Yamauchi's daughter. The business readily expanded under Kaneda's reign to become Japan's largest playing-card manufacturer. When he retired due to ill health, he was forced to ask his grandson, Hiroshi Yamauchi, to abandon college and put himself straight into the director's chair. Knowing the established personnel at Nintendo would have difficulty following his lead, Hiroshi's first task as president was to systematically fire any employees that he suspected might take issue with his sudden authority, re-initialising the Nintendo Playing Card Co with blood as red and fresh as his own.

HIROSHI WAS ON a dark yet well navigated path to success, and one he intended to exploit as he set about taking Nintendo beyond the playing-card business. Floating the company on the Osaka and Kyoto Stock Exchanges in 1962 generated the revenue he needed to dabble in experimental markets. Instant packet rice soon fell by the wayside, as did the wayward endeavour into 'love hotels' (a venture Hiroshi was rumoured to have a very personal interest in) which rented rooms by the hour and employed a conspicuously burlesque workforce. His Daiya taxi firm was doing well until the driver's union confronted him over low wages and forced him to revert to his opening business tactics and dispense with any upstart staff – in this case, everyone.

CORPORATE GROWTH IS A FICKLE MISTRESS. ONLY THE RESOLUTE CAN SURVIVE HER

The new toy division supported itself admirably enough to stay Hiroshi's firm hand however, and a young designer called Gunpei Yokoi CONTINUED >.





Hard To Love Hardware

Accessories have always been the backbone of the fruitful after-sales market, but as Nintendo has proved, they can't all be gold mines…



NAME: **U-FORCE POWER FIELD CONTROLLER**
MANUFACTURER **BRODERBUND**

LOOKING LIKE one half of a Battleships game, the U-Force was supposed to recognise users' hand movements by way of two large infrared sensors and translate them into button presses on the NES controller. The U-Force is widely regarded as one of the worst (and least functional) peripherals ever.



NAME: **NES CLEANING KIT** MANUFACTURER: **NINTENDO**

AN ELABORATE and expensive 'system' for cleaning the contacts on the NES cartridges (a SNES version was also available, though the console was less susceptible), extra refills had to be bought regularly via mail order. Not a bad idea in theory, though cotton buds and surgical spirit did a better job and weighed in at only a fraction of the cost.



NAME: **ROLL & ROCKER**
MANUFACTURER: **LJN**

"YOU BECOME the controller," exclaimed the ponderous box of the Roll & Rocker – a device that looks like lilac bathroom scales and invited children to knock out their teeth on the coffee table by wobbling around while trying to watch TV. Turn ups on your jeans and Day-Glo socks are optional.



NAME: **R.O.B.**
MANUFACTURER: **NINTENDO**

THE PRIMARY purpose of the Robot Operating Buddy was to disguise the NES as a toy (which he did, although the Zapper deserves more praise) when the US market crashed. He was also designed to struggle around on gamers' carpets doing nothing and not interacting with the games in the slightest. Worse than Jar Jar.



NAME: **THE POWER GLOVE**
MANUFACTURER: **MATTEL**

BEARING IN mind *Predator* had just come out at the cinema, this device was as awesome as it was impractical. Massively overhyped compared to the game support it received, punters went mad for these before realising how ridiculous they were and hiding them on a shelf to gather dust next to the toasted sandwich maker.

Nintendonitis

OVER THE YEARS, LITIGIOUS GAMERS HAVE ATTEMPTED (AND SUCCEEDED) TO PIN THEIR GAME-RELATED INJURIES ON POOR OLD NINTENDO

In 1990, the term 'Nintendonitis' was coined by a doctor who treated a woman experiencing excruciating pain in her thumbs after her vigorous introduction to games saw her playing on SNES for over five hours.

Two 13-year-old girls were seen playing *Super Mario Bros* for three hours straight when one of them got particularly worked up, began to shake, and exhibited epileptic seizures for several minutes.

Media sound bites have triggered the headline "Pokémon Causes Cancer" after someone from the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York abbreviated the cancer-causing POK erythroid myeloid ontogenic gene as the 'POKEMOn gene' in *Nature* magazine. Pokémon USA threatened the centre with legal action should use of the abbreviation continue.

'Nintendo Thumb' and 'Tetwrist' are now recognised terms in the US medical industry due to the amount of thumb, wrist and tendon repetitive strain injuries encountered through compulsive use of videogame controllers. Not just Nintendo's, of course, the 'dog bone' replacement controller was designed to stop such symptoms.

In 1997, over 700 people in Japan reported epilepsy-type symptoms, convulsions, nausea, vomiting and irritated eyes after watching the 'Computer Warrior Porigon' TV episode of *Pokémon*. Future episodes carried health warnings.

In 2004, *The Sun* published a report by 'top brain expert' Professor Graham Harding of Aston University who claimed several Nintendo titles contained specific light sequences capable of triggering seizures. "Videogames do not cause epilepsy," said Nintendo, despite the fact that its website states that, "Some people (about one in 4,000) may have seizures or blackouts triggered by light flashes or patterns, such as while watching TV or playing videogames, even if they've never had a seizure before."

caught his eye with a high-selling coin-operated 'love tester' machine. It measured the stray capacitance of the user's clammy hand rather than actual love – surprisingly, no law suit was ever filed. It was Yokoi's affinity for electronic toys that began Nintendo's love affair with videogames, and over the next ten years it replaced Nintendo's other forms of dubious enterprise.

Yokoi teamed up with graphic artist Shigeru Miyamoto to create the game that single-handedly saved Nintendo of America from bankruptcy. *Stubborn Gorilla* (mistakenly translated into English as 'Donkey Kong') featured the run-and-jump talents of 'Jumpman', who was later renamed after Mario Segale – the warehouse landlord that Nintendo of America had previously been unable to pay. The game introduced Nintendo to the rest of the world, along with its many and lucrative courts of law.

LICENSED TO COLECO, *Donkey Kong* was intended to launch the new ColecoVision console until Universal Studios caught wind of the giant-gorilla-themed game and decided it infringed upon *King Kong* copyrights. Rather astutely, Nintendo of America had written a liability waver into the Coleco licensing contract and wasn't in the least bit intimidated, happily throwing Coleco to the wolves while it watched matters escalate. Nintendo only stepped in when its Japanese parent felt at once insulted by Universal and Coleco, and also doubtful of its American leg's capabilities.

Nintendo of America deftly stepped into the legal proceedings and put paid to Universal's claims with a reminder that the film studio had successfully thwarted RKO Pictures in 1975 by proving the *King Kong* story and characters were public domain – all so it could remake the movie without paying royalties. A successful result for Nintendo, it paved the way for the gaming giant's affinity for brutal legal action over tolerant, cordial conduct.

Although it's easy to remember Nintendo for the harsh, oppressive and often creatively stifling licensing agreements third-party developers suffered for trying to create NES games, it must be taken in context with the state of the industry at the time. The American market had vaporised due to a glut of terrible games and avaricious developers – a market Nintendo had revived with its new console and wasn't about to squander on digital tat.

But the resulting tyranny ultimately led the cautious console manufacturer to lose the support and respect of the software community. Its infamous 10NES lockout system, which prohibited unlicensed software from running on the NES console without Nintendo's approval and direct involvement, began to strangle game developers to the point of retaliation. The 'Nintendo Seal of Quality' was losing its golden lustre, the importance shifting from representing the quality of the game to demonstrating the obedience of the developer and its willingness to invest in the hallowed 'Seal'.

Only permitted to release five games per year – with those games being exclusive to the NES for a further two years – and severely restricted by stringent censorship policies, even a good game struggled CONTINUED >.

YOKOI'S AFFINITY FOR ELECTRONIC TOYS KICK STARTED A LOVE AFFAIR WITH VIDEOGAMES

The curious Love Tester was just one of the many unusual products to have passed though the Japanese giant's doors.



The multinational phenomenon that is Nintendo Company Ltd started out in 1889 in these tiny premises.

THE GAMING GIANT (…who doesn't play games)

THE THIRD AND most prolific of Nintendo's presidents and heir to the Yamauchi fortune, Hiroshi Yamauchi is one of the most successful and fascinating businessmen in the world.

Son of Shikanojo Inaba and Kimi Yamauchi (granddaughter of Fusajiro Yamauchi), his father abandoned the family, leaving Hiroshi to be raised by his grandparents. When Hiroshi was 21, his grandfather suffered a debilitating stroke which later led his death. This left Hiroshi in charge of Nintendo in 1949. Rigidly imperialistic, most every significant product Nintendo has manufactured over the last 50 years was personally authorised by Hiroshi, who admits he's never even played a videogame.

Now recorded as the 226th richest man in the world (at an estimated $3.9 billion) he stepped down as the company president in 2002, leaving Satoru Iwata (who is the first non-Yamauchi president) at the helm. In 2005, Hiroshi retired from Nintendo's board of directors, refusing to take his pension as he thought his old company could put the money to better use. Not a man to cross, few can claim to have known such incredibly vibrant careers or enviable lifestyles.



Not a man to cross, few can claim to have known such incredibly vibrant careers or enviable lifestyles as Hiroshi Yamauchi





Ninten-don't Quote Me



"Videogames are bad for you? That's what they said about rock 'n' roll"
Shigeru Miyamoto



"I definitely enjoy kicking ass more than taking names. I think the team at Nintendo would agree. I've done a lot of kicking ass"
Reggie Fils-Aime



"[People who play RPGs are] depressed gamers who like to sit alone in their dark rooms and play slow games"
Hiroshi Yamauchi



"I could make *Halo*. It's not that I couldn't design the game. It's just that I choose not to"
Shigeru Miyamoto



"Customers do not want online games"
Satoru Iwata



to make money for the software companies. Through fair means and foul, game developers set aside almost as much time and effort for reverse engineering the aggravating security system as they did to creating new NES titles.

Nintendo's retaliation was swift and characteristically severe, immediately targeting any insurgents with its deadly legal machine in an attempt to retain its once justified grip on the home console market. Distracting it from the competition while law suits dominated the company's agenda, Sega moved in on markets ignored by the gaming powerhouse. Long delays in launching the console in Europe, Australia, Canada and South America – with players having to wait as long as four years after the Japanese release – saw customers losing patience and turning elsewhere to sate their entertainment desires.

IN 1990, ACCLAIM abruptly refused to adhere to the austere licensing agreement and released games simultaneously on Sega's platform as well as Nintendo's. The sudden shift in power forced a painful leniency in Nintendo's policies, and a host of other third-party developers turned their noses up and followed Acclaim's lead. The console wars raged throughout the 16-bit era, with Nintendo's only saving grace being its annual *Mario Bros* release and the massive proportion of market share it had to lose. But SNES had landed too late, and Sega (along with newcomer Sony) was planning for its next console well in advance of Nintendo.

Nintendo had been thoroughly submersed in the race to own *Tetris* – one of the more reasonable contenders in the turgid debacle – and used it to monumental effect with the new Game Boy handheld, shoring up the company under the strain and backlash it was suffering in the console market.

Since the early days of hanufuda playing cards and 'love hotels', Nintendo has seen its logo adorned on many different products. It has now become the firm we know as the most family-orientated videogame company in the world.



MARKET SUPREMACY AND ABJECT FAILURE IS ONLY EVER ONE CONSOLE AWAY

Sony had been given a definite leg up on the development process after a partnership with Nintendo to develop a CD-ROM drive for the SNES had gone sour. Nintendo was strangely tightfisted with hardware specifications, stymieing Sony engineer Ken Kutaragi's attempts to design the drive, when all of a sudden it announced at the 1989 June CES show that a partnership with Philips had been forged, and all previous work with Sony scrapped (as ordered by Hiroshi himself). This was the first Sony had heard on the matter

All Rise

Nintendo pays its lawyers well and demands value for money as we can see from some of its hard-line cases:

1989: TENGEN INC VS NINTENDO

Tengen (of Atari Games) got hold of a copy of the 10NES lockout chip software via fraudulent means from the American patents office, and then used it to program its own version of the security chip therefore bypassing the infamous Nintendo 'Seal of Quality' money pit. The company then sued Nintendo for monopolistic business practices.

OUTCOME: Nintendo is (eventually) cleared of the monopoly claims.

1989: NINTENDO VS TENGEN INC

Nintendo obtained the videogame rights for *Tetris* directly from the Russians and sued Tengen just as its version of the NES cartridge hits the shelves. Fortunately for Atari, Mirrorsoft (which issued the faulty licence) took the brunt of the costs.

OUTCOME: Nintendo got its own back (as well as a little bit extra), Tengen *Tetris* was pulled from the shelves and heavy damages were levied.

1987: NINTENDO VS BLOCKBUSTER ENTERTAINMENT

Nintendo sued Blockbuster for renting out NES games, claiming that it went beyond "fair use" terms and infringed on profits. The case was settled out of court, although Nintendo successfully pursued a case against Blockbuster for providing photocopied manuals with its game rentals.

OUTCOME: Nintendo won, and Blockbuster resorted to giving out its own instruction cards with games.



and, infuriated, went ahead with the development work themselves to create the PlayStation. Nintendo attempted to block Sony from entering the market with a court injunction, but was quickly dismissed. The Philips deal never came off, and the SNES never received its CD drive.

As thanks for creating the best-selling console of all time, Gunpei Yokoi's next project (the 3D Virtual Boy) was rushed through its development phase to ensure Nintendo would have something new and shiny on the shelves at the same time as Sega and Sony. The result was a stopgap console that made Nintendo's increasingly suspicious consumers very apprehensive. The high price tag, warnings about not allowing children under seven years old to use the goggle-based display, impending arrival of the N64 and reports of players suffering from eye strain and headaches pushed the badly marketed console into obscurity and exclusion.

THE N64 SAW a rather undeserved return to popularity for Nintendo however, when loyal gamers embraced the dichotomous technology: hot new graphics using expensive, restrictive ROM cartridges. True enough, many of the games played well and sported coin-op-worthy visuals, but at significantly higher prices and with tragically reduced staples of audio and FMV. This was a machine chosen for success by the consumer and not by the corporation. But where does this mild berating of the world's longest-surviving videogame manufacturer leave us? What does it tell us about Nintendo?

For one thing, it's an aggressive conglomerate out to make money, regardless of how its publicity machine tries to paint a jovial, caring, whiter-than-white veneer on its latest consoles. But can any other company in the game industry claim otherwise? Certainly not. This is a corporation known to repeat its own mistakes and yet never fail to learn from them, proving time and again that market supremacy and abject failure is only ever one console away.

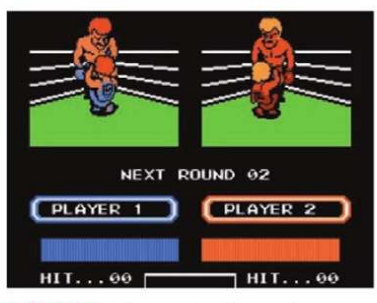
Nintendo isn't evil. Nor is it good. It's simply a hard-nosed, intrepidly enduring business and, as gamers, we should love it as one of our most valuable (if occasionally disposable) assets.

Naughty Nintendo

Nintendo has always prided itself on being a family orientated, wholesome, good fun, socially conscious campaigner, but something was bound to slip under the censorship razor wire



BIBLE ADVENTURES: The three missions that you must face include collecting two-by-two animals for the Ark, fending off Goliath, and carrying the baby Moses across the desert. The latter is particularly funny since Moses can be drowned, thrown at spiders and lost without consequence.



RING KING: This could well come down to the fact that the developer simply had pure minds full of innocent thoughts, and it's only those of us who've been taken by the devil that see dubious behaviour here, but between the rounds there was something going on not usually seen in the ring…



CHO ANIKI: There's no reason every gamer shouldn't be represented on the SNES, but such stereotyped, flamboyant, homoerotic (ginger beer) imagery is hardly a tribute to the gay community. Still, this hard one-on-one fighter certainly made Nintendo history with its bevy of buff boys.



CAPTAIN NOVOLIN: When does product placement become educational? *Captain Novolin* on the SNES can't answer that as it tries to make a hero from a diabetic in a mask and cape. It's Captain Novolin's misfortune to avoid a host of murderous, sugary snacks in an attempt to 'educate' younger gamers.



HITLER: A few titles tried to get a certain character through the censor-matic machine but failed for reasons known only to nervous executives. Western versions of *Bionic Commando* and *Wolfenstein 3D* tried to cast Hitler as the final boss, both were rejected.



ICE CLIMBER: A far cry from Nintendo's current highly sanitised image, the original Famicom version of *Ice Climber* asked players to club seals to death. The seals were then changed into fantasy creatures in the worldwide versions. Don't expect to see any seal-clubbing games on Wii.



Sexy Parodius Arcade [Konami] **1996**

OVERJOYED AT SEEING the return of old-school Konami mascot Pentarou in *New International Track & Field*, this month **games™** was inspired to reacquaint itself with some of the penguin's earlier escapades. We've written about the semi-obscure *Penguin Adventure* in these pages before, but Pentarou is best known for his appearances in the *Gradius* spin-off *Parodius*.

Turning to the fifth game in the series, *Sexy Parodius*, we were horrified to discover that the web-footed wonder isn't actually playable. He appears in the cut-scenes, whereas the 'stars' of the show include a girl in a bunny costume, an angelic pig, and a stick-man on a paper plane. Suitably odd characters for the crazy shoot-'em-up, but we would have preferred the real deal. Penguin lovers can at least console themselves with the fact that one of Pentarou's cousins appears as a toilet-wearing end-of-level boss.





BEHIND THE SCENES

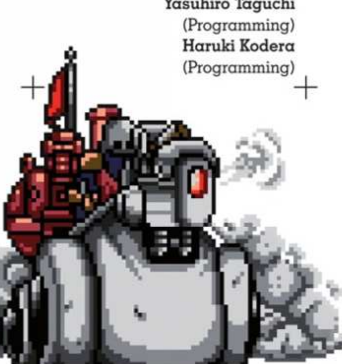
SHINING FORCE

Join us as we meet Hiroyuki Takahashi, president of Camelot and mastermind behind the Nineties vintage Shining Force games, in a dungeon in deepest Shinjuku



Released: 1992-1998
Format: Mega Drive, Game Gear, Mega CD, Saturn
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Camelot Software Planning

KEY STAFF:
Hiroyuki Takahashi (Planning, production, scenario)
Shugo Takahashi (Planning, production, scenario)
Yasuhiro Taguchi (Programming)
Haruki Kodera (Programming)



IT SHOULDN'T HAVE been this complicated. From the outside looking in, *Shining Force* throughout the Nineties represented everything that was great about Sega: a 'big' Sega property and a unique calling card for the Mega Drive and Saturn, it delivered some of the finest deep tactical role-playing of the decade. Yet while the series' course through to *Shining Force III* led mesmerised players to a vast Holy Land of blissful RPG perfection, Sega's treatment of the games and their second-party developer, Camelot, only went from bad to rotten.

Prior to collaborating with Sega on the development of 1991's preparatory dungeon-crawler *Shining In The Darkness*, Hiroyuki Takahashi had been in employment at Enix, working on the *Dragon Quest* series of games and in particular making a significant contribution to the production of *Dragon Quest IV*. After that, he left Square Enix, went independent, formed his own company and soon began work on *Shining In The Darkness*. As Takahashi clarifies, "I was never an employee of Sega, but from *Darkness* on I worked as game designer and team leader on the *Shining Force* series. My younger brother Shugo wasn't a Sega employee, either."

If it sounds like Takahashi's keen to distance himself from Sega it's because he is. There's a whole litany of hurt to relate, but for a start consider this: for each of the three *Shining* Mega Drive games, Sega gave Takahashi's team the bare minimum funding offered to out-of-house developers. *Shining In The Darkness* was a success, but apparently not enough to merit a raise for the development of *Shining Force*; and although *Shining Force* was a hit, there was still no raise forthcoming when it came time for a sequel to be built. There is more, but in the interests of chronology let's return to the story of the series' conception. **CONTINUED >.**



The Game Gear titles lacked town exploration but provided a healthy dose of portable strategy gaming nonetheless. A DS remake is long-overdue.





I BELIEVE ENGAGING BATTLES ARE THE MOST CRUCIAL FACTOR IN AN RPG





The *Shining* world isn't one for equal opportunities, unfortunately. All elves tend to be archers and all women, magic users.

When attacking, the perspective changes to this dramatic angle, making for one of the series' most iconic features.

A few of the *Shining Force* games were never localised into English, but are perfectly playable in Japanese anyway.

Spanning three separately released discs, *Shining Force III* is a true 32-bit epic.

Shining Force III took the series into 3D and was one of the best looking RPGs on Saturn.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:
SWOOPER D

My first memory of *Shining Force* was playing it on import round a mate's after he borrowed it from his uncle. Well, it was all in Japanese, but once we sussed some of the actions and magic we were hooked. Naturally it became the reason for me parting with my pocket money upon its UK release. I never got to play the second one until I played the recent *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection*. But when I bought *Shining Force III* on the Saturn I played it so much I was having grid-based dreams. In my eyes, the series is the best tactical RPG. It's a travesty that the other two scenarios of *Shining Force III* were never translated.

Posted by:
MFNICK

Shining Force II is what got me into RPGs in the first place. My mum bought it for me as a complete surprise – I had no idea what it was, but as soon as I started playing it I was hooked. It just had so many interesting characters to meet, locales to discover and party members to gather. But the combat's where it really shone. It was unlike anything else I'd ever played. Being overhead and on a grid with set movements per turn while managing a team of characters was just so mentally stimulating at the time and allowed for great strategic planning. Even better, when you finally went to attack an enemy (or when they attacked you) it switched to a ground view, showing off some beautiful artwork.





■ The *Shining* series' icon-based menus made it one of the most user-friendly RPGs of all time.

Helping Nintendo

■ With Sega effectively turning its back on Camelot, Takahashi began the search for another major company that could benefit from little Camelot's big skills. He recalls how back in 1998 Nintendo was "very isolated" and "seemed to be helpless". The reason for that sentiment? "I felt Nintendo's line-up of games was lacking. There's no doubt that Nintendo is the company that produced today's game market, and it's Nintendo that has provided the highest-quality game software to the largest number of users. But back then I felt as though NCL's line-up was missing something, so it was Camelot's turn to help. Nintendo was most in need of our assistance." As well as the excellent *Mario Tennis* and *Golf*, Camelot went on to create a sublime handheld tactical RPG series in *Golden Sun*.

Shining Force was launched in March 1992. "At that time, the games industry's way of thinking about role-playing games put the emphasis squarely on telling an interesting story," Takahashi laments. "That was apparently the purpose of role-playing games – just to tell a good story. However, I've always believed that engaging battles are the most crucial factor in an RPG. Even today, you see many role-playing games that are designed according to a philosophy where battles are just a bonus and the story is the main thing. I could never accept that and I wouldn't go along with it. RPG players spend such a great amount of their time in battle that there's no way a battle system should be treated merely as something that's tacked onto a good story."

As it transpires, a relatively obscure Japanese PC game called *Silver Ghost*, released by Kure Software Koubou in 1988, exerted an influence on the design of *Shining Force*. "Prior to *Silver Ghost*," Takahashi explains, "I didn't like tactical simulation games at all – they gave players too much time to think… their tempo was all over the place. But *Silver Ghost* was different: it was a simulation action type of game where you had to direct, oversee and command multiple characters; it was the title that convinced me simulation games didn't have to be crap."

■■■ *SHINING FORCE'S* MOST obvious inheritance from *Silver Ghost* is the gochakyara (multiple character) system, whereby the chess-like command of units drove the series' battle system and satisfied Takahashi's desire for a truly engaging brand of tactical combat. Daring to mention Intelligent Systems' (ostensibly) similarly structured *Fire Emblem* series only earns us a humorous retort: "The original Famicom *Fire Emblem* game? The tempo of that title was so bad that it wasn't something I even wanted to play. *Fire Emblem* had zero influence on *Shining Force*." Takahashi continues, "Rather, before participating in the *Shining Project* I was thinking, 'I wonder if there's any way we can take the battles from *Dragon Quest* and make them more fun?' *Shining Force's* battle system came about as a result of following that line of thinking to its logical conclusion" – evidently with a little help from *Silver Ghost*.

Even with *Shining In The Darkness* completed (see Dungeon Fascination boxout for more on the production of that series prologue), development of *Shining Force* was ambitious and consequently proved extremely difficult for Takahashi's team to perfect. "From the battle system through to the combat screen, we entered development with the aim of making everything new, featuring only things that had never been seen in a game before. *Shining In The Darkness* was more successful than I had anticipated – in terms of sales and reviews – so I think I might have been overestimating my ability as a creator somewhat… In fact it was terribly difficult to produce *Shining Force*. For the battle screen and title screen we took inspiration from a certain other game, but what I didn't realise until after we'd finished development was that that game had used half of its four megs of ROM on those two features alone. Of course, we didn't copy the exact screen designs, but still… we created such memory-intensive battle screens that it was incredibly hard to pull it off. But hey, I remember feeling young and powerful back then.

"My basic stance as far as RPG development is concerned, is to produce worthwhile and enjoyable battles. *Shining Force* was the first embodiment of

I DIDN'T LIKE TACTICAL SIMULATION GAMES. THEY GAVE PLAYERS TOO MUCH TIME TO THINK



Shining Force Gaiden: Final Conflict was never officially translated, but a fan-made patch is available online if you know where to look.





The 3D presentation of *Shining Force III* allowed the story scenes to play out with dynamic camera angles that dramatically followed the action.

that philosophy. I felt that the primitive battles in games such as *Wizardry* and *Dragon Quest* were enjoyable, but we introduced the notion of 'distance and range' to form *Shining Force's* tactical battles. However, in order to produce and hone that battle system we had to go through an incredibly difficult period of experimentation with trial-and-error procedures… We overcame so many obstacles to develop that battle system, but it was a labour of love and we ended up deeply attached to it."

Unfortunately for Takahashi, while players and critics universally appreciated his team's fine work on *Shining Force*, Sega's bosses were less enthusiastic. In part this was a result of differences in attitude and approach between the Sega managers Takahashi had initially dealt with and those who succeeded them – new additions to the administration one by one transforming the company from a modest game-loving outfit to an austere profit-obsessed corporation. "From 1990 on," Takahashi explains, "Sega gradually became a larger scale business. New managers were recruited and things started to change. When Sega's managers were replaced, we came to be seen just as a small, unruly subsidiary that wanted things its own way, and because of that we were forced out of Sega's main line of business. From that point on, I felt that Sega had ceased to be a true software-orientated company."



HIROYUKI TAKAHASHI
Camelot President

This sad state of affairs forced Takahashi to begin production of *Shining Force II* with a team that had been decimated and, effectively, rebuilt. Most of the original *Shining Force* staff were beginners who had potential but no prior experience. However, even though they now had a successful game in their back catalogue, Sega's reluctance to increase the level of funding it granted for the development of this sequel meant that from an economic perspective there was little motivation to stick with the project.

"We were in a really precarious situation at that point," Takahashi admits, "because we knew that if we couldn't produce another hit we would have no future. The number of staff we had working on the *Shining Force* series varied with each game until the Saturn era, during which time the team was pretty settled and didn't change much. We carefully chose our staff from among many candidates, and after *Shining Force II* the core staff remained and grew stronger together. *Shining Force II* was an experimental CONTINUED >.

The *Shining Force III* Premium Disc is a great place to find lots of concept art like this.

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



PC-88 release *Silver Ghost* provided Takahashi with a template for *Shining Force's* advanced version of its multiple character system.



The *Golden Sun* games benefited from experience gained during Camelot's work on the Game Gear-based *Shining Force Gaiden* titles.







What makes [*Shining Force*] so extra special is that there is a real sense of control over the combat sections. Consequently I find myself wincing at every blow that my comrades take and cheering heartily at every fallen foe. It sounds crazy but then play the game for yourself and see if you don't do the same.

Mean Machines Sega, Issue 8



■ Even on Game Gear, Camelot was able to create some huge bosses to fight.



title where we improved the story and enhanced the game's 'RPG-ness'."

Between 1992 and 1995, Takahashi also found time to oversee Camelot's production of the *Shining Force Gaiden* series of Game Gear-based spin-offs. "We developed the *Gaiden* series as a simpler variation of *Shining Force* – one that could easily be played on a portable console. At the time, I believe that a lot of games for handhelds were developed without much thought. But we wanted to produce a portable title that would be a genuine system seller, something that was more than just a 'not bad for a handheld game' type of affair." They succeeded in doing just that, and although the first *Gaiden* outing was initially restricted to a local Japanese release (a Sega publishing issue that would again hinder Camelot when it was time for the world to experience *Shining Force III*), it did eventually receive a translation as part of 1995's Mega CD compilation *Shining Force CD*.

While Takahashi's aims at the outset of the *Shining Force* series' development had been battle-orientated ambitions, the post-*Shining Force II* hardware migration from Mega Drive to Saturn – along with the maturing of Sega's core audience – meant that change was now essential. Specifically, Takahashi was aware of the need to give more attention to Camelot's storytelling, which had always been composed as an overarching, catch-all conceptualisation that included both the main *Shining Force* series and its different-name/same-bloodline close relatives. In the mid-Nineties there was a distinct shift in style: the early-period narrative can be traced right up to Camelot's 1995 Saturn debut, *Shining Wisdom*, but the following year's *Shining The Holy Ark* brought with it a revamped, more complex tone.

SHINING FORCE III SERVED AS PROOF WE COULD DO OTHER TYPES OF STORY

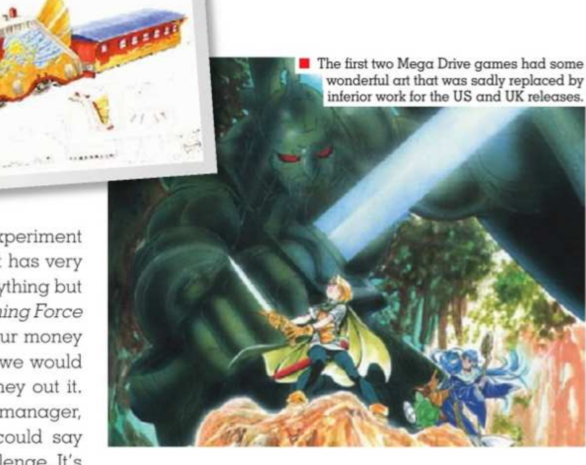
"Until *Wisdom*, the idea had been simply to develop a story that would attract a broad range of users," says Takahashi "From *Holy Ark* on, the story and game world were redesigned to focus on the Saturn players of the time. Japanese Saturn owners were generally in their late-teens or early-twenties. The age group had shifted away from children, so with these Saturn owners as the focus, we constructed a world where the concept was 'fantasy that can be enjoyed by adults'. This new approach led to a darker, deeper world than we had been creating for the 'all ages' category prior to *Holy Ark*. We started to work on the plot of a story that would be appropriate in such a world.

Things moved up another notch once Camelot turned its attention to the epic, triple-scenario *Shining Force III*. "We wanted *Shining Force III* to serve as proof to those users that we could do other types of story," Takahashi remembers. "But on the other hand, we didn't want to reject those fans who had never complained about the good-against-evil story lines. In that sense, in order to appease both sets of fans, *Shining Force III* ended up as a compilation of the results of lots of trial and error." The resulting game still told a story of good versus evil but radically allowed you to play from the perspective of 'evil' on its second disc, revealing that the definitions between the two weren't so clear cut.



Dungeon Fascination

"When I was working as a producer at Enix," Takahashi says, "I remember seeing a 3D dungeon game brought in by a freelance game creator. I was very impressed. I thought that if he was in charge of programming we'd definitely be able to make something special, and so I started to plan. That game creator was Taguchi, who is still our main programmer today… Because we were on such a tight budget, apart from the programming and graphics, I did nearly all of the work on *Shining In The Darkness*. I suppose the basic concept behind *Darkness* was 'realism'. I thought it would be exciting if the player could actually travel to a fantasy world and walk around, exploring old houses, dungeons and other places. It was in essence a continuation of the sense of excitement you'd get from moving through the dungeons in older games such as *Wizardry*. By 'reality' I'm not talking about true realism – I mean the feeling that you really are progressing through actual houses and dungeons, and the same thing applied to the battles. In *Darkness*, *Wisdom* and *Holy Ark*, you can find evidence of our preference for the sense of 'being there' over accommodating standard game styles. I felt there were possibilities unfurling in the RPG genre, and I wanted to challenge myself to create RPGs in various styles."



The first two Mega Drive games had some wonderful art that was sadly replaced by inferior work for the US and UK releases.

Relative to team size and resources, Camelot's efforts with the *Shining* series had always been a little bit on the ambitious side, but the three-disc creation of *Shining Force III* was the team's boldest experiment and remains the high point of a series that has very few lows. The game's development was anything but simple: "We put everything we had into *Shining Force III* – it took so much time and so much of our money that no matter how many copies we sold, we would never have been able to make much money out it. I'm both a game creator and a business manager, and from the business perspective you could say that *Shining Force III* was a ridiculous challenge. It's a miracle that the game was fully realised."

The passing of time means that Hiroyuki Takahashi is now willing to speak frankly about his disappointments, even if he has no regrets. In the case of *Shining Force III*, that spells rejection, demotion and imposed limitations. "I can tell you this now: at the time of *Shining Force III*, Sega's management was, I believe, in a state of complete chaos," reveals Takahashi. "It's probably hard for you to fathom, but what was once a major part of Sega's market – namely the *Shining* series – was ejected from Sega's 'main line' of games, and the money we received from Sega to produce *Shining Force III* was less than half what they would spend on the development of 'main' games."

The ultimate fallout from this situation meant that English speakers were only treated to the first of *Shining Force III*'s three parts. "Release abroad was terribly limited," Takahashi reflects, "but that was just a consequence of it being treated so poorly by Sega in Japan. And it wasn't just *Shining Force III* that was mistreated. For example, at one point Sega was refusing to even release *Shining The Holy Ark*. We had hoped that all three *Shining Force III* scenarios would be released internationally, but our hopes weren't fulfilled. Regardless, we made *Shining Force III* in order to give something back to the fans who had supported the series up to that point. Of course it's a shame that the game wasn't a big hit, but even though it's been more than ten years since the release of *Shining Force III*, people still love the game. And because of that, it's a game that has made me genuinely happy."

And will the West ever get to experience that same happiness? It would have been remiss of us not to ask about the prospect of a *Shining Force III* remake/re-release, but Takahashi's response isn't one we wanted to hear: "Even though we produced all of the plans, graphics, did all of the programming, and produced all of the music for the *Shining* series, Sega maintains the rights. That's why we can have no say in the matter." A wry smile speaks volumes.



Dreamcast Unbelievers

Time for Camelot to leave Sega behind

"We were in attendance as guests when Sega announced the Dreamcast," Takahashi confides. "On stage there were Sega managers alongside representatives of four major software houses who were pledging to support Sega's Dreamcast market… Everyone was grinning." Here the story takes a predictably blue tone: "Camelot had at that point been rejected; we were apparently no longer needed in Sega's marketplace. Even though people recognised that we had made the greatest contribution to the growth of Sega's consumer market, I felt on that day as though the time had come for us to leave. I felt lonely, but at the same time I felt relieved because I sensed that there was no future for Dreamcast. Sega had become even less of a software-orientated company. Even if Camelot had made the best software for Sega, recovery of its market share still would have been impossible…"



Hall Of Fame... Sonic

His mascot status may have been tarnished by a recent string of sub-standard games, but the 16-bit era Sonic remains one of the greatest retro characters of all time

IN 1990, ALEX Kidd, Sega's mascot at the time, sat shyly by, watching a very happy plumber jumping atop the world, leading Nintendo to dominance. Sega needed an icon. And fast. Something that could catch up with Mario and halt his incessant jumping with a great big logo reading 'Sega'. To this end, the company introduced an internal competition to design the new character that would rekindle their flame in the console war. AM8, Sega's Research & Development department, came up with a wealth of designs, including a Theodore Roosevelt in pyjamas, from which the Sonic boss Doctor Eggman would later be shaped; an armadillo, which became Mighty the Armadillo; a rabbit; a bulldog; and a hedgehog.

To replicate Mario would instantly reduce Sega to a secondary position, behind Nintendo. Mario was a slightly humble, podgy and rather slow plumber who had taken the helm for running and jumping; in order to glean a fresh audience and a uniqueness in brand, Sega needed to move in the opposite direction, to produce a cool character for a fast and slick style of gameplay. This brought the character competition down to two: Mighty the Armadillo and Sonic the Hedgehog. Both the armadillo and the hedgehog are capable of rolling into balls and are therefore adaptable to the gaming mechanic of the eventual title, but Naoto Oshima's Sonic was chosen for his 'spiky' features. The importance of this seemingly tiny detail is obvious: Sonic's slicked-back hair is one of the defining features that make him cool – it is akin to many anime characters and a popular fashion – and has been used to give his spin-attack a circular saw-like visual that would not have been so effective with an armadillo. So it was that the slick speedster with an exuberance of ego and a restless taste for excitement was set loose on the world. Mario was fun; Sonic was cool.

As a mascot, Sonic the Hedgehog was important not just to his own game, but also to Sega as a whole. For this reason, Sega used aggressive marketing with Sonic unlike any other game of the time. It was a campaign that both matched and amplified Sonic's persona: it had attitude. Even prior to his release, Sonic the Hedgehog was touring with the popular Japanese music group 'Dreams Come True', where he featured on the tour video trailer. But 1993 was the year of the hedgehog. That a memorable and busy 12 months saw Sonic sponsoring Japanese professional soccer team JEF United Ichihara, where he appeared kicking a football on the team's uniform; he was also employed by Formula One's Williams team, the car of which featured Sonic's white gloves and red trainers; and he even released his own comic book and cartoon series. Add to these the 'Sega Sonic Popcorn Shop', three junior book series, six games in the same year, the 'Sega Sonic Cosmo Fighter' children's ride, and the 65-foot tall Sonic balloon that debuted in 1993's Thanksgiving Day Parade and not only do you have one busy hedgehog, you also have the emergence of an icon in the public eye.

IT IS POSSIBLE, however, that Sonic was not actually Sega's creation. A pamphlet that accompanied the *Sonic Adventure 2* Special Tenth Anniversary Gift Pack tells the story of children's fiction writer Mary Garnet. The tale tells of Mary and her husband, who often worked away from home as a test pilot for the United States Air Force on a project named 'Blue Gale', the aim of which was to break the speed of sound. Mary had nicknamed her husband 'Hedgehog' because his hair stuck up on end, like the quills of the animal, when he took his helmet off. The nickname inspired Mary to combine the Blue Gale project with the Hedgehog nickname and decorate her husband's flight jacket with a blue hedgehog mascot. This blue hedgehog then developed into stories that Mary would tell her children when their father was away. The hedgehog, which she named Sonic, was a hero who would save the world and protect the innocent people and animals from evil. The similarities here are more than obvious and though many doubt the truth of the story, it is difficult to reason why Sega would tell it otherwise.

Wherever the creative flare for Sonic came from, he instantly became one of the most important creations in the industry. Sonic welcomed in a generation of platform-mascots-with-attitude – nearly all of which copied his anthropomorphism – and gave the platformer a new style and versatility. But above all, he gave the rare gift of cool. Before Sonic, platform characters were almost universally cute, bland, and devoid of personality. Then came the hedgehog: he wagged his finger, slicked back his hair, and sped through levels, beating up a fat evil scientist. Simply put: Sonic brought attitude to the platform game.

>. MAGIC MOMENTS



What more can be said? *Sonic The Hedgehog* saw the birth of Sonic and the opening of the floodgates for mascots with attitude.



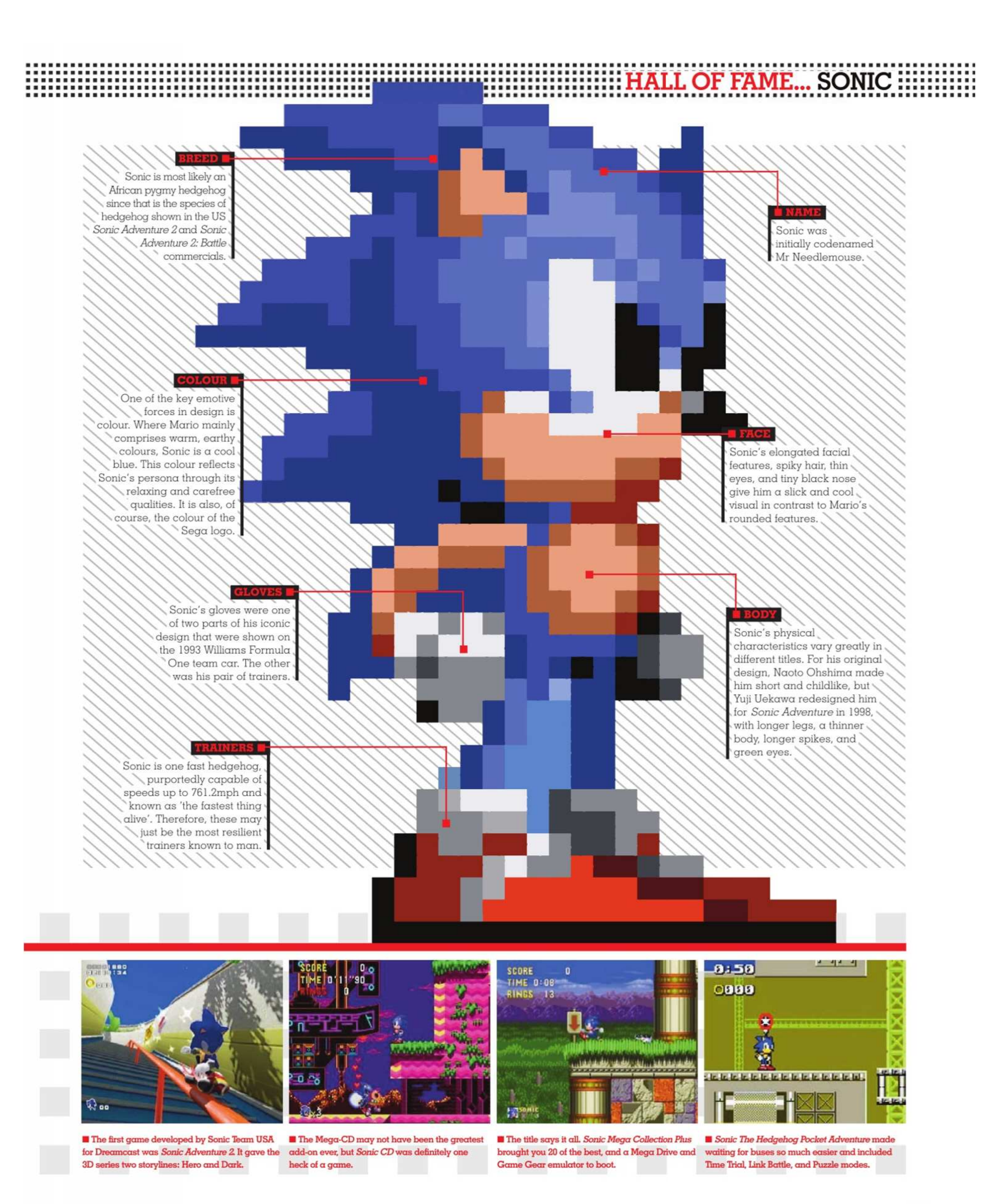
Sonic The Hedgehog 2 introduced us to Tails and provided Mega Drive with its biggest-grossing game ever at 6 million sales.



Sonic & Knuckles gave us lock-on technology that allowed you to play entirely new games by plugging *Sonic 2* or *Sonic 3* into the cartridge.



Combining elements of the *Sonic Adventure* and *Sonic The Hedgehog* series, *Sonic Advance* saw the first Sonic title on a Nintendo console.



■ The first game developed by Sonic Team USA for Dreamcast was *Sonic Adventure 2*. It gave the 3D series two storylines: Hero and Dark.

■ The Mega-CD may not have been the greatest add-on ever, but *Sonic CD* was definitely one heck of a game.

■ The title says it all. *Sonic Mega Collection Plus* brought you 20 of the best, and a Mega Drive and Game Gear emulator to boot.

■ *Sonic The Hedgehog Pocket Adventure* made waiting for buses so much easier and included Time Trial, Link Battle, and Puzzle modes.

HALL OF FAME... SONIC
THE ALSO-RANS

AERO THE ACRO-BAT

Aero The Acro-Bat was one of the few platform games of the time that sincerely attempted to develop gameplay. Aero, a circus bat, was perfect for this. Being an acrobat, he had a wide variety of moves that gave the title true originality. He also had an abundance of attitude in his design – his sharp teeth, white gloves, and black wings giving him an appearance somewhere between a vampire and a magician. Sadly, the quality of character was not matched by the quality of the game itself.

ALFRED CHICKEN

Perhaps the only 2D chicken in history to have a political party named after him (the Alfred Chicken Party ran in the 1993 by-election for Christchurch, Dorset). Alfred Chicken had about as much success as said party (which came second to last with 18 votes). Being a chicken doesn't do a lot for a game's character: he was slow, unoriginal, and rather tedious. Chickens, apparently, are lacking in attitude, too, which is perhaps why they are more often turned into vindaloo than games.

JAMES POND

The idea of mixing James Bond with a goldfish seemingly brings satire to the anthropomorphic archetype that the character follows. By spoofing such a legendary figure as James Bond, EA effectively gave *James Pond* a hugely developed back story and persona without actually painting that visage. As such, *James Pond* is instantly cool, but not on the back of any of his own merits.

RADICAL REX

Radical Rex certainly lived up to his name; he was a fire-breathing, skateboarding, pogo-stick-jumping, Tyrannosaurus of a dude, with such quotes as 'Radicall!' and 'Excellent!' that would quite happily see him sharing a pizza with Michelangelo (the turtle, not the artist). Radical Rex featured a wide variety of moves, enemies, and background imagery, but none of it was much fun and *Radical Rex* was so slow he may as well have been comatose.



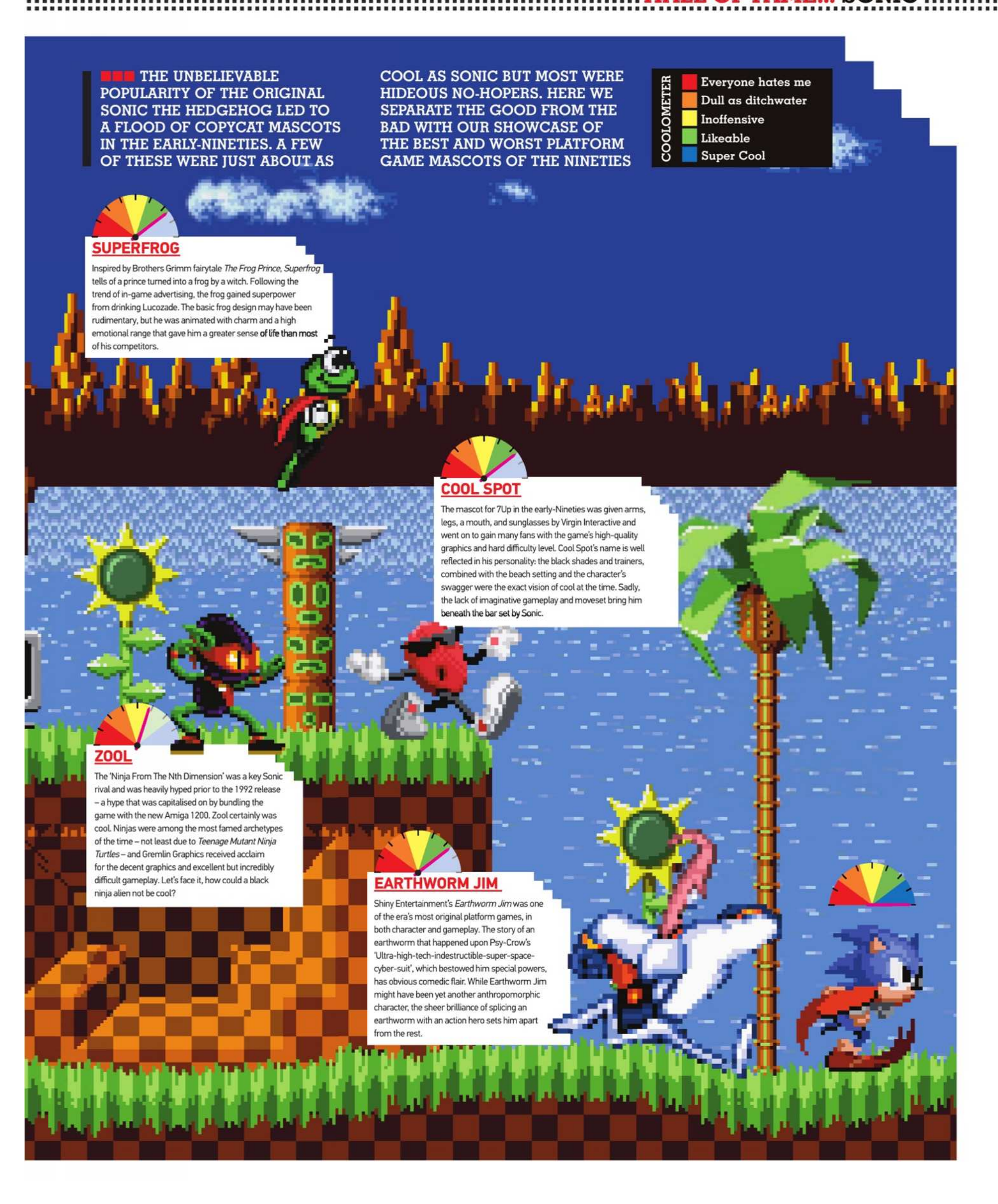
TITUS THE FOX

One of the more obvious choices of animal, Titus the Fox gains coolness for the popularity and persona of said creature. The impact of Titus's design was limited by his generic smile and happy-go-lucky expression, a choice that made him appear childish and brought him to mediocrity. The plot, a saving-the-girlfriend scenario, is more suited to the bad-ass characters of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups – notably *Double Dragon* – which a fox character could have reflected admirably. Sadly, the cutesy graphics brought this to naught.

BUBSY THE BOBCAT

Bubsy The Bobcat was originally hyped as 'the next *Sonic The Hedgehog*' and in many ways it was. The similarities are obvious: the background graphics, the speed of play, the waterfalls and bridges all nodded to Sonic. He may have had Sonic's speed, sense of fun and adventure, and a sense of humour that the hedgehog lacked, but Bubsy never came close to Sonic's popularity. Bubsy ticked the same boxes as Sonic (except that he was far too easy to kill), but he was merely following in the blue one's wake.





THE UNBELIEVABLE POPULARITY OF THE ORIGINAL SONIC THE HEDGEHOG LED TO A FLOOD OF COPYCAT MASCOTS IN THE EARLY-NINETIES. A FEW OF THESE WERE JUST ABOUT AS COOL AS SONIC BUT MOST WERE HIDEOUS NO-HOPERS. HERE WE SEPARATE THE GOOD FROM THE BAD WITH OUR SHOWCASE OF THE BEST AND WORST PLATFORM GAME MASCOTS OF THE NINETIES

COOLOMETER

- Everyone hates me
- Dull as ditchwater
- Inoffensive
- Likeable
- Super Cool

SUPERFROG

Inspired by Brothers Grimm fairytale *The Frog Prince*, *Superfrog* tells of a prince turned into a frog by a witch. Following the trend of in-game advertising, the frog gained superpower from drinking Lucozade. The basic frog design may have been rudimentary, but he was animated with charm and a high emotional range that gave him a greater sense of life than most of his competitors.

COOL SPOT

The mascot for 7Up in the early-Nineties was given arms, legs, a mouth, and sunglasses by Virgin Interactive and went on to gain many fans with the game's high-quality graphics and hard difficulty level. Cool Spot's name is well reflected in his personality: the black shades and trainers, combined with the beach setting and the character's swagger were the exact vision of cool at the time. Sadly, the lack of imaginative gameplay and moveset bring him beneath the bar set by Sonic.

ZOOL

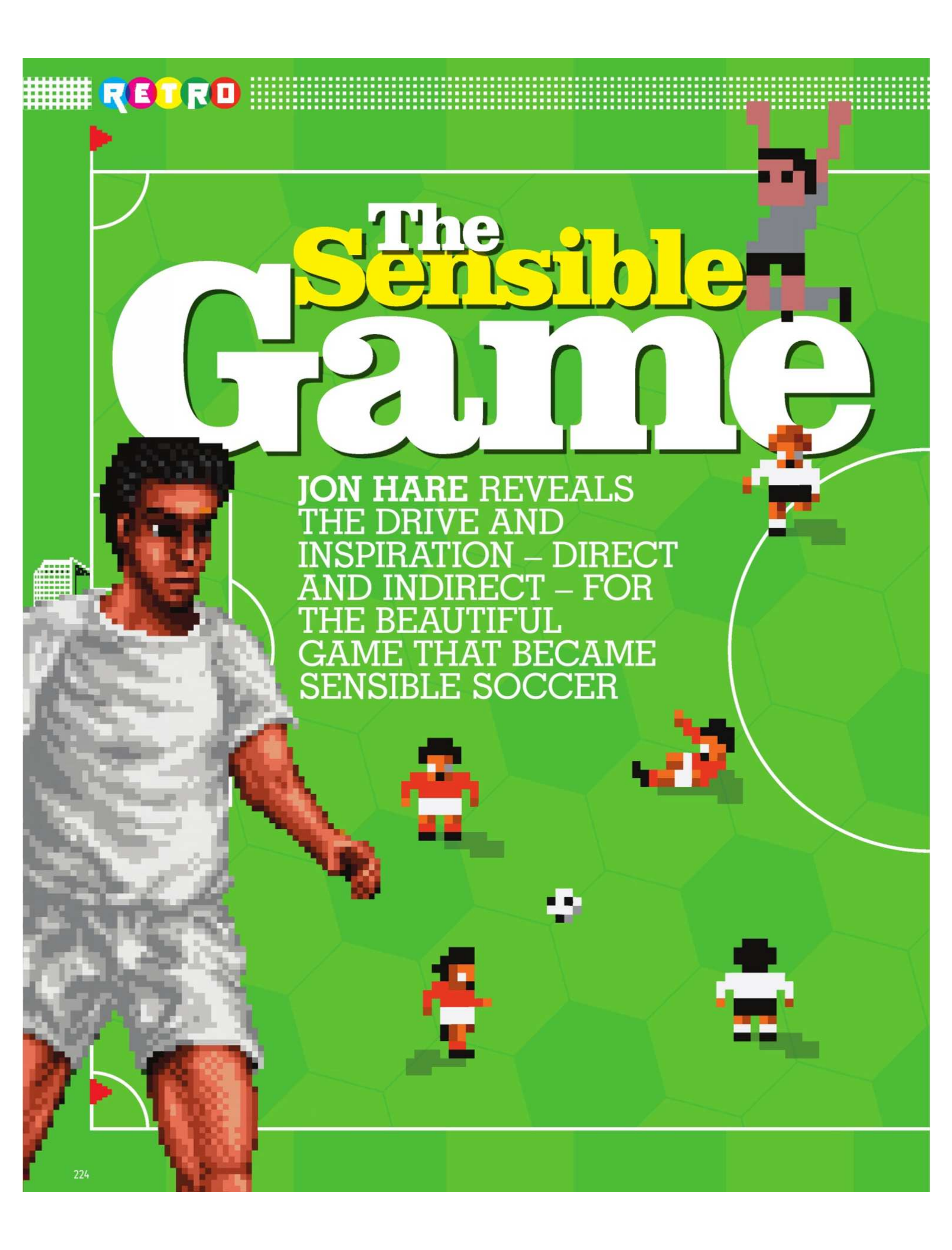
The 'Ninja From The Nth Dimension' was a key Sonic rival and was heavily hyped prior to the 1992 release – a hype that was capitalised on by bundling the game with the new Amiga 1200. Zool certainly was cool. Ninjas were among the most famed archetypes of the time – not least due to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* – and Gremlin Graphics received acclaim for the decent graphics and excellent but incredibly difficult gameplay. Let's face it, how could a black ninja alien not be cool?

EARTHWORM JIM

Shiny Entertainment's *Earthworm Jim* was one of the era's most original platform games, in both character and gameplay. The story of an earthworm that happened upon Psy-Crow's 'Ultra-high-tech-indestructible-super-space-cyber-suit', which bestowed him special powers, has obvious comedic flair. While Earthworm Jim might have been yet another anthropomorphic character, the sheer brilliance of splicing an earthworm with an action hero sets him apart from the rest.

The Sensible Game

JON HARE REVEALS THE DRIVE AND INSPIRATION – DIRECT AND INDIRECT – FOR THE BEAUTIFUL GAME THAT BECAME SENSIBLE SOCCER

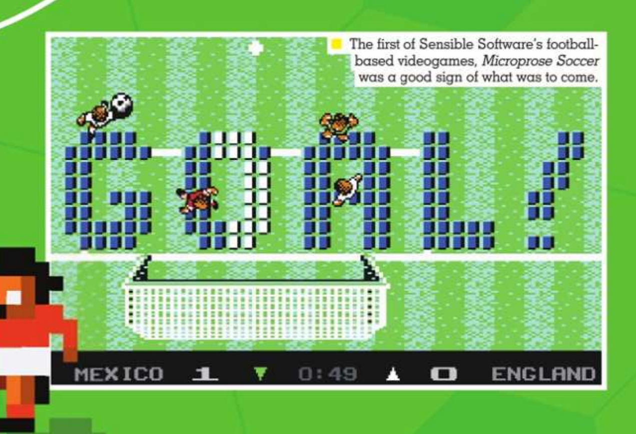




PASSION, EXCITEMENT, competition, innovation and diversity. Football videogames had the lot. Nowadays it can be argued that football titles are like a severe form of the Scottish Premier League – two titles vying for the top with other developers having seemingly given up trying to topple them. But while *FIFA* and *Pro Evo* rarely offer anything startlingly new from one year to the next, they dominate the charts and are as expected by fans as a Ronaldo wink and a dive.

In the early days, however, football games were radically different from one another. Developers tried hard to capture the spirit of the game and few succeeded as well as Jon Hare, who not only created *Microprose Soccer* in 1988, but also went one better with *Sensible Soccer* four years later. And then, his Sensible Software development house surpassed both with *Sensible World Of Soccer* in 1994 and became a worthy champion.

In some ways, *Sensible Soccer* then lost its way a tad. It had a couple of ill-fated forays into 3D, but in 2004 a mobile version produced by Tower Studios was nominated for a BAFTA. More recently the magic of *Sensible Soccer* was rekindled when it was dusted down and spruced up for Xbox Live Arcade. It seems gamers just can't get enough of playing as tiny players on a pitch viewed from the sky. Not for them, it seems,



The first of Sensible Software's football-based videogames, *Microprose Soccer* was a good sign of what was to come.



the realistic stadia, near photorealistic players and television-style commentary.

If there is one thing Hare had on his side, it was his love of football. A Norwich City fan, Hare, now 43, is still a regular at Carrow Road and is still interested in producing soccer games on many platforms. He was a consultant on *Football Superstars* and *Real Madrid: The Game* and he has been working with Turkish developer Sobee on a 3D multiplayer online soccer title called *I Can Football*, which is still at the beta phase. More excitingly, he is currently designing and developing a game called *Fingertip Football*, which promises to follow on from the successes of *Microprose Soccer* and *Sensible Soccer* and is being designed specifically for the unique features of the iPhone, just as *Microprose Soccer* and *Sensible Soccer* were designed specifically for the C64 and Amiga.

The iPhone game will be made by Hare's own Tower Studios. "We're working on perfecting the controls," he tells us. "The iPhone offers a fresh way to play and it's an exciting platform." And much of this is born from his feeling that football games have become rather stale. "The feel of the game of football is being lost," he laments.

He is determined not to see true innovation in football videogames "do a Norwich" and become relegated, lost amid gloss and hype. He believes he made a truly great football game back in the day and he drew inspiration from the titles around at the time. In some cases, he looked at football games and dismissed them out of hand but even in doing that, he helped to shape what became *Sensi*. And here he tells us how...





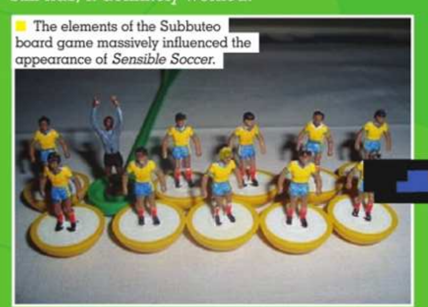


SUBBUTEO

Released: **1946** Developer: **Hasbro**
Format: **Tabletop**

"IT MAY SOUND odd, but one of the major influences on *Sensible Soccer* wasn't even a videogame – it was Subbuteo. I used to play this game all the time as a kid and all of those small sprites, that viewpoint, the way the action unfolds can be seen in this finger-flicking game.

I liked the fact that you could buy Subbuteo players representing teams across the world. I wanted to reflect the world status in *SWOS* in particular and it's why we were the first football videogame to have blond-haired and black players and the first to represent the teams from over 90 leagues all around the world including Poland, Mexico, Yugoslavia, India, El Salvador and South Africa. In those days you didn't need the welter of licences that modern games companies are forced to wade through. And given that freedom, it was my intention to build a game anyone in the world could identify with and enjoy, and judging by the huge international fan base *Sensible Soccer* still has, it definitely worked."



The elements of the Subbuteo board game massively influenced the appearance of *Sensible Soccer.*

FOOTBALL MANAGER

Released: **1982** Developer: **Addictive Games**
Format: **Spectrum, CPC, C64, BBC Micro, Amiga**



Although *Sensi* features light management elements, Hare claims he was not influenced by *Football Manager.*

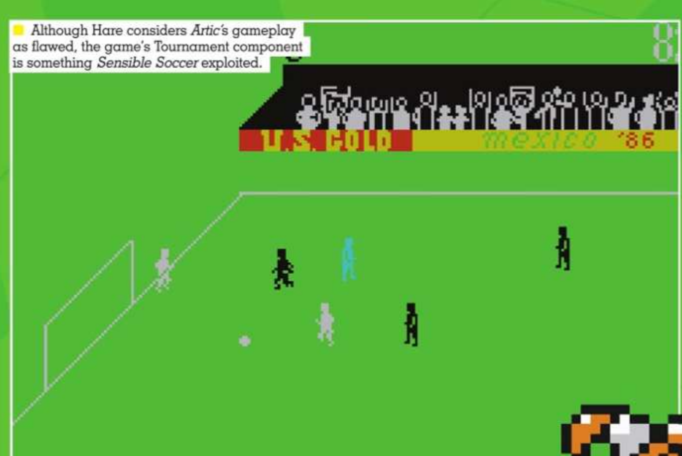
"WHO WAS IT who produced those iconic management games? Kevin Toms, yes, that's it. When this game came out in 1982, it was really big. It really did start a whole new genre of games and it was very highly regarded. You may think that the management elements of *Sensible World Of Soccer* were influenced by this game in some way but the truth is that I didn't really play management games at the time. I did try Kevin Toms' game and I liked the basic principles, but that's as far as it went in terms of influence.

When we put a management aspect into *Sensible World Of Soccer*, I was using my own instinct, looking at what I thought would be fundamental to replicating management in a videogame and leaving out anything too complicated or fiddly. So while I know Kevin Toms made some brilliant football management simulation games and that the series ran for more than a decade, my influence was really the real-time strategy elements of *Mega Lo Mania.*

Sensible World Of Soccer was a light management videogame, but at the same time I don't think there has ever been a better player/manager game than *SWOS.* I've been a football fan all of my life and like most supporters there is that feeling that you're more of an expert than you perhaps really are. However, I feel what went into management in the level of interactivity that we wanted with *Sensible World Of Soccer* worked extremely well, made the game fast, accessible and deep and reviewers and players loved it."







Although Hare considers *Artic's* gameplay as flawed, the game's Tournament component is something *Sensible Soccer* exploited.

ARTIC WORLD CUP FOOTBALL

Released: **1984** Developer: **Artic Computing** Format: **Spectrum, CPC, C64**

"IT MAY SOUND like I am going through a bunch of games and slagging them off, but *Artic Soccer*…? It was like a tech demo. I played it, I thought hmmm, that's interesting and then I thought, well, you know, what's next? Because for me, that was it. *Artic Soccer* was nothing more than a game I could play once and quite happily never try again.

It was this game which made me think about how a football game actually plays out in reality for videogame players. You essentially play a football computer game for up to ten minutes. It's a short experience, you win, lose or draw and either feel ecstatic, despondent or blasé and then you do it all over again. But this can become very dull if there's nothing intrinsically in that game to keep you coming back for more.

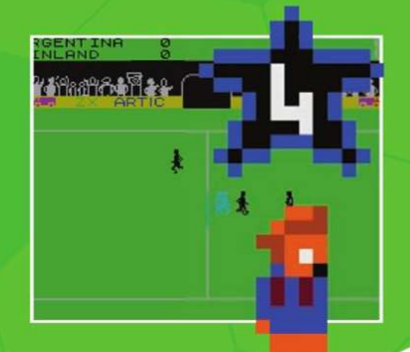
And what did this game have? It fell short on tactics, it had six players on each side and while there were extras associated with the game like a penalty shoot-out in the training mode, it didn't appear to have any use in the actual game because in the game there were no fouls.

If there is one thing the game had going for it, it was tournaments. It is essential for a videogame to have tournaments because you want to have a feeling of progression. You can't just play these games in isolation like friendlies as one-offs, because you ultimately want some depth and a longer challenge – a feeling of accomplishment."

ARTIC SOCCER WAS A GAME I COULD PLAY ONCE AND HAPPILY NEVER TRY AGAIN











MATCH DAY

Released: **1984**
Developer: **Ocean Software**
Format: **Spectrum, CPC, C64, BBC Micro**

"BEFORE WE STARTED to work on *Sensible Soccer*, I hadn't extensively played many other football games. I know *Match Day* was a prominent game during the Eighties and its sequel was also well received, but I only played it a bit. And again, it was a side-on game that didn't capture football for me.

I like to compare good games to their psychological equivalents in real life. For example a fighting game should feel like suddenly finding yourself in a fight in a pub. If a guy walks up to you and is looking for a confrontation, then your mind begins to work overtime. You are thinking lots of things at once – how to deal with the situation, how to get out of it, what to do if he throws a punch, when you need to be ready for that. And all the time your adrenaline is pumping. But have you ever played a fighting game and felt like that? Maybe in *Fight Night*, but it's rare.

So likewise, have you ever played a football videogame and felt like you do when you've been on a soccer pitch? With games like *Match Day*, you definitely don't get that feel. There's no spatial awareness and, like *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer*, it's too slow. We looked at this aspect and thought, right, we've got to produce a game with greater speed. Players have got to be able to use instinct. They just can't have this long on the ball. And so that's what we did with *Microprose Soccer*, our first football game. We created a system that was faster paced and put you under pressure to act fast. Of course, this game still feels pretty pedestrian compared to *Sensible Soccer*, but that came later."

TEHKAN WORLD CUP

Released: **1985** Developer: **Tehkan** Format: **Arcade**





"IF THERE WAS one football videogame that inspired me and my business partner Chris Yates, it was *Tehkan World Cup*. In fact, all of our inspiration for *Microprose Soccer* was drawn from this. You only have to look at the games side-by-side to see that, but we didn't do a carbon copy. Of course, we added in all of our own elements and that's why we think *C&VG* ended up calling *Microprose Soccer* the "best sports game on any format ever."

What we liked about *Tehkan World Cup* was the top-down view, naturally, and the fact that it had simple controls. There was a single fire button and a large trackball, and you were able to control the direction and velocity of that ball with the trackball. So we worked hard on our game's physics to get the same feel. We had all of these bending



After enduring the slow gameplay of *Match Day*, Hare realised that good pace encourages instinctive player reactions.

balls in *Microprose Soccer* and added in aftertouch and rain, not to mention speed and sliding tackles. We even applied most of this one-button principle to *Sensi*, albeit it with a joystick.

And it all comes back to that up-and-down versus side-on debate. I still believe people think up-and-down as a player and side-on as a viewer, certainly the viewer style mentality is becoming more and more evident in games players, particularly console players, as every year passes. However in those days people treated home computers as more than just extensions of their television, and this willingness for players to work a little bit harder for their successes is the reason why *Sensi* became our most successful game and helped us to be named Developer Of The Year in 1992 and 1993.

We've tried twice since to re-create the *Sensible Soccer* formula in 3D, but ultimately it just didn't suit and that is why the older *SWOS*, particularly *Sensible World Of Soccer 96/97*, is still recognised by today's *Sensi*-playing community as the king of the *Sensible Soccer* series."







EMLYN HUGHES INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

Released: **1988** Developer: **Audiogenic Software**
Format: **Spectrum, CPC, C64, Atari ST, Amiga**

"IF I'M BEING totally honest, I thought *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* was slow, blocky and uncontrollable. I didn't like it at all. I just found it uninspiring, It was games like this that made me realise that side-on action in a football videogame just doesn't work. You simply cannot aim a shot properly when you're viewing a game from the side in this way.

When you think about it, aiming the ball and shooting, smashing that ball into the back of the net and being able to do so with some level of precision and skill, is a key component in football. So it figures that it has to be a key skill in football videogames. What we did first with *Microprose Soccer* and then with *Sensible Soccer* was take a top-down view so that players could angle the ball and see where they were going to aim.

We wanted to get away from this feeling that you were sitting in the stand or on the touchline and kind of viewing the action. That's how you *watch* football, not play it. And while I agree that you don't play a game from above either, what that did was give you a chance to play tactically and get a feel for the overall play. Actually, you know, what makes a good striker and what makes a bad striker? In many ways it's the ability to squeeze that ball in between the post and, for me, *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* is a bad centre forward because it didn't give you that ability."



Emlyn Hughes' side-on view is more reminiscent of passively viewing a game of football than playing it.

KICK OFF

Released: **1989**
Developer: **Ocean Software**
Format: **Spectrum, CPC, Atari ST, Amiga, NES, MS-DOS**

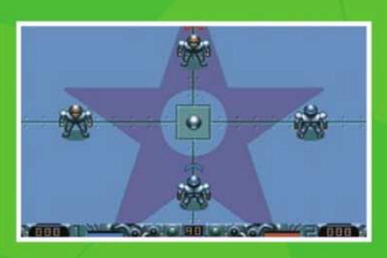
"BY THE time *Kick Off* came out, we had already created *Microprose Soccer* two years previously. Both games made use of a more top-down view and up-and-down scrolling from goal to goal, which I've always favoured, as you can tell. I liked *Kick Off*. It was a good game, but it did have its flaws, particularly the inability to see the positions of your team-mates due to the directly overhead camera angle. What I admired was the scale of *Kick Off* since it used a big pitch. It has a very quirky way of controlling the ball, some elements of which are good and some slightly irritating. But *Kick Off* did open up the public's minds to the concept of new control systems in football games, which we continued to develop with *Sensible Soccer*.

The reason we also had small sprites and a bigger viewing area in *Sensible Soccer* was down to our style at the time. We first stumbled upon tiny characters and a bigger semi-overhead view of your environment when making *Mega Lo Mania* and once we discovered they worked we used them in *Sensible Soccer, Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Golf* as well.

Mega Lo Mania was the pivotal game in Sensible's history as a company. We worked very late nights, developed a new game look and structure and we played a lot of *Kick Off* as we were making it. The very first *Sensible Soccer* characters were actually *Mega Lo Mania* characters dressed in football kits running around *Mega Lo Mania* landscapes. We thought it was a good look after we did that, we kept exactly the same viewpoint and perspective and scaled the pitch around it. The next thing to get right was the basic running speed. I spent quite a while timing how long it would take to run these characters up the pitch, adjusting it so that it wouldn't be too slow but it wouldn't be too fast either. That was crucial for the pace and flow of the game, we had to get it just right.

I'd like to think both ourselves and Dino Dini learned from each other and we both went on to better our original games with great sequels. They were times of great innovation in football videogames when you look back, and it was good to have these two top-down games vying for people's attention."

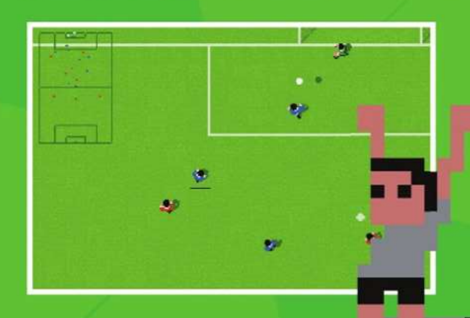






Although not a football game, *Speedball's* movement and menu systems provided much inspiration for Hare.

IT WAS GOOD TO HAVE THESE TWO TOP-DOWN GAMES VYING FOR PEOPLE'S ATTENTION



SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

Released: **1990**
Developer: **Image Works**
Format: **C64, Atari ST, Amiga, CD32, PC, NES, Master System, Game Boy, Game Boy Advance, Mega Drive**

"I USED to love *Speedball 2*. You can see how, as different UK teams, we learned from and took bits of games from each other during this period of games development. The player movement and pitch layout in *Speedball* was similar to *Microprose Soccer* and then later on for *Sensible Soccer* we adopted similar managed players and menu systems to *Speedball 2*. You don't always have to look towards your own genre of game when producing a title. It's all about understanding what makes a game, any game, so much fun and easy to navigate."

FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

Released: **1993** Developer: **EA** Format: **Amiga, MS-DOS, Mega Drive, Master System, Mega-CD, Game Gear, SNES, 3DO, Game Boy**



Hare has finally come to terms with the fact that *FIFA* stole *Sensible Soccer's* crown all those years ago. He can forgive, but he'll never forget.





"THERE'S ONE thing I have to get straight: *Sensible Soccer* was in no way influenced by *FIFA International Soccer*. This is a game I have taken years to accept as it was the game that took away *Sensible Soccer's* crown as the king of football games. For me, this franchise was also the beginning of the end of real innovation in football videogames, it took soccer titles away from focus on the actual gameplay itself and into the realms of flashy presentation, an emphasis of style over substance, this in turn was to lead to an unrivalled predominance on side-on football games, which has continued to date. Did people really prefer a game where the ball was permanently stuck to the feet of players? In *Sensible Soccer* you had to chase the ball, choose whether or not to gather it, and then try to keep hold of it, that's what we believed gave you a more playable game and so when we saw games like *FIFA* we were determined to stick to our guns. Although it has to be said that for the Mega Drive and SNES versions of *Sensible Soccer* we did find it necessary to stick the ball to the player's feet more than in the home computer versions.

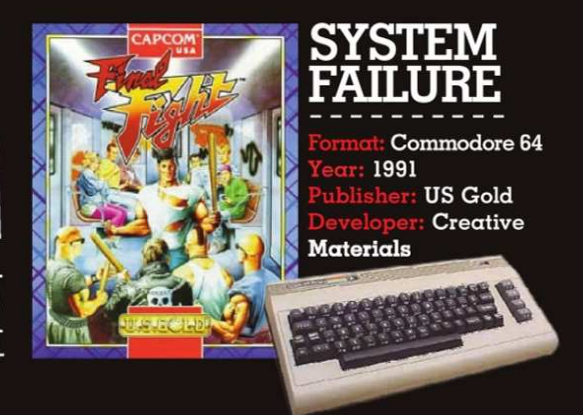
It's actually funny the way games have turned out. With football games, it's still about controlling a team of players and passing it to various team-mates who you can then go on and control. Neither *FIFA* nor *Pro Evo* has slipped away from that. And yet you see first-person shooters going in the opposite direction, putting you in the shoes of the guy in combat. There are very few football games that use the first-person perspective – *Football Superstars* by Monumental Games being the notable exception – and in this case the control system, being so new, definitely has room for improvement.

So, in general, what we have with football games now is a replication of the way television treats soccer. It's less about prioritising playability and more about trying to make games look like a televised match with on-screen graphics, commentary and so on, with some gameplay fitting in around the presentation demands. Developers are not looking to re-create the feel of playing at all costs, more to focus on re-creating the television experience for the user, so they play the game as an involved member of the audience rather than as a time-pressured player with his socks around his ankles, this fact in itself is very interesting. It's intriguing to see what the audience expectation is now as the nature of the games-playing population changes. Would they rather be watching a big match live on television or be out there playing in a local team or with their friends? Are the years of children never allowed to play out in the streets finally beginning to show in the nature of the games they choose to play?"



CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing arcade ports under the spotlight



SYSTEM FAILURE

Format: Commodore 64
Year: 1991
Publisher: US Gold
Developer: Creative Materials

Final Fight

THE HYPE



ORIGINALLY ENVISAGED as a sequel to *Street Fighter*, Capcom's *Final Fight* expanded the horizons of the beat-'em-up, taking the combat to a wide range of scrolling environments. It could never be described as a genre breakthrough, but it was a much more accomplished side-scrolling fighter than any other at the time. The variety of playable characters, the wide array of special moves and the staggeringly large, beautifully drawn and animated sprites all made *Final Fight* one of the most compelling arcade games of the year. Created at the dawn of the 16-bit age, *Final Fight* was converted to both generations of home games machines, but with the Super Nintendo famously unable to power an arcade-perfect conversion, 8-bit users could never expect a comparable experience.

THE WARNING SIGNS

If this blurb was a radio ad, the bracketed text would be spoken in a hurried, whispered voice.

Perhaps US Gold was hoping we'd only look at the Amiga screens before deciding to buy *Final Fight*…



"Nothing hits harder" than the realisation that you're about to risk a month's pocket money on something that could be awful.



THE REALITY

WITH THIS and *Street Fighter II,* you have to wonder if Capcom *ever* managed to produce a decent arcade conversion on C64. This particular example was so shoddy that even the Spectrum version managed to outclass it in every possible way. Like *Street Fighter,* it forces you to load every single level individually, turning a fun romp through Metro City into a tedious crawl. More damagingly, the visuals are so bad that they go beyond mere ugliness and become such a confusing mess that it's difficult to tell exactly where you are or who you're fighting, the majority of the time.

1 We have so many questions about Cody. Why is he dressed like Guy? Why has he blended with the background? Why the hell is his fist bigger than his head? And why, oh why, do his legs appear to bend in impossible ways when he does a flying kick?

2 Every new background has to be loaded from tape or disk, but it's not exactly worth the wait. Most look terrible and all have so little interactivity or change of pace/ direction that you might as well play the first stage forever.

3 Combat controls are poor. To pull off a special move, you need to push the stick while holding fire. Different directions trigger different moves, but you'll just end up waggling the stick and hammering the button most of the time.

What You Should Have Played It On



The SNES port was the best version for the longest time, but even that was flawed due to the lack of one major character or a two-player option. The Mega CD version fixed both those issues, though.





BEHIND THE SCENES

BURNING RANGERS

Burning Rangers couldn't save Sega's Saturn format from going up in flames, but that was only because the Rangers' arrival at the scene of the disaster was too late. We talk with firefighter extraordinaire Takao Miyoshi about a late Saturn classic



Released: 1998
Format: Sega Saturn
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team

KEY STAFF:
Yuji Naka (producer)
Naoto Oshima (director)
Takao Miyoshi (game designer)
Naofumi Hataya (sound)

IN AN ALTOGETHER more innocent age, now just out of sight in the rear-view mirror – the optimism-fuelled Nineties, when people still smiled in public – and with Sonic Team at the apex of its collective performance, the charismatic Burning Rangers were sent out to save lives in Game World. There was camaraderie and fire extinguishers, hell, they even had their own theme song.

Blame it on the inexplicable cravings of Western gamers en masse or perhaps the global malaise felt in recent years, but it can seem as though games whose very reason for existing is to facilitate the desires of those who wish to terminate the existences of game characters (whether modelled on humans, aliens, or monsters) have never been more popular. *Burning Rangers* combined ambitious, forward-thinking, advanced technologies with the admirable notion of rewarding the preservation of in-game characters. It was a good kid, all right – one hundred per cent enthusiastic in embracing life and conveying a palpable sense of gratitude from NPC to Burning Ranger during memorable rescue scenes.

Takao Miyoshi, now of Sega's Global Entertainment R&D 3 studio but a key designer at Sonic Team in 1997/1998, laments that things have changed. "I think that there are enough brutal, bloody games out there now. It would be good if more 'heart warming' game experiences were being produced."

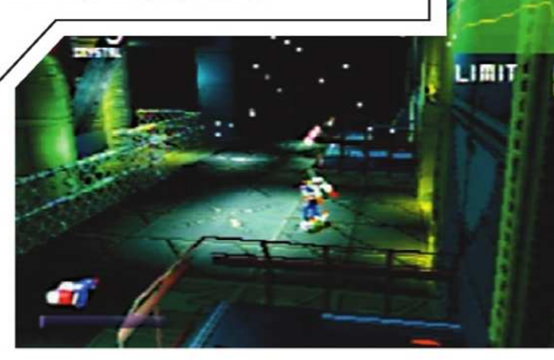
Little more than an anime-inspired sci-fi adventure, *Burning Rangers* revealed a surprising depth of character to those who respected its style and were prepared to dig beneath its surface. Crucial to its central tenet – when threatened, CONTINUED >.







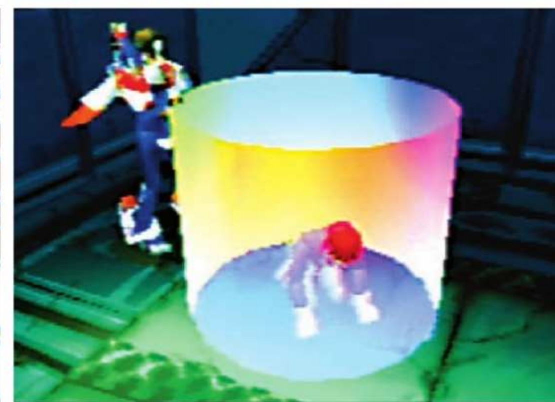
BURNING RANGERS FEATURED AMBITIOUS, FORWARD-THINKING TECHNOLOGIES



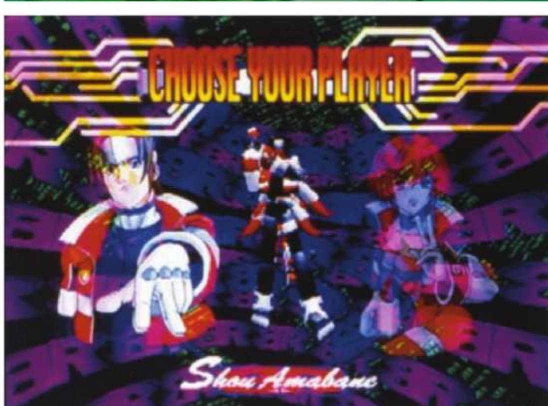




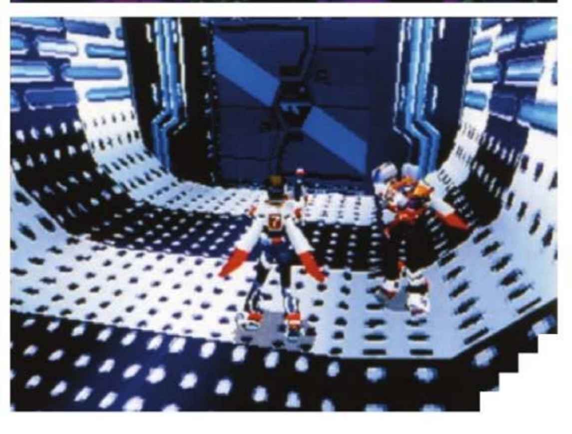














Posted by:
RIVAONI
I loved receiving mail from those you'd rescued once the rescue was over.

Posted by:
ALISTAIR THOMAS
I loved this game. I played it at a time when I played every game to death, and this was no exception. I loved exploring the levels and trying different things on each playthrough. It was before its time. I think it's due for an update/remake, as a lot of people missed out first time around.

Posted by:
CRAYMEN EDGE
Burning Rangers was great fun and felt very innovative, but it was definitely hindered by the hardware. It would be great to see what a game like this would be like if made today now that developers have a few console generations' worth of experience at making 3D action games.

Posted by:
RAINLEVEL
Really, Sega should have just held onto it until the Dreamcast came out like it did with *Shenmue*. The Saturn was already on its last legs and the leap in power would have been hugely beneficial.

Posted by:
REDLEADER30
Burning Rangers stands the test of time as one of the best and most original games ever made and is a unique gaming experience from start to finish.

Posted by:
BIG MEAN BUNNY
Rangers was special as it came at a time when even the most fanatical Saturn fans had given up the fight. It may have had the usual Saturn issues, but I hadn't been as impressed by a game since *Tomb Raider*.



human lives should be saved and preserved at any cost – was the *Burning Rangers'* collective lifesaving power, supplied with futuristic firefighting equipment. The sci-fi element of the game's story establishes the Burning Rangers as a group of Earth defenders, working against threats such as a massive spaceship on a collision course with the planet. In practice, this setting was used as a means of shoehorning firefighting heroes Shou Amabane, Big Landman, Lead Phoenix, and heroines Chris Parton, Iria Klein, and Tillis – the titular Burning Rangers team – into scenarios where fires and explosions were breaking out, buildings were collapsing and lives were being endangered.

This was a deliberate ploy on Sonic Team's part, as Miyoshi explains: "Our first inspiration came from the explosion and building destruction scenes of Hollywood movies. We just wanted to describe the heroism of lifesaving in that loud, explosive type of setting." *Burning Rangers* was the actualisation of that idea, a game driven by heroic acts and perpetuated by the thank-you notes of grateful survivors. "From our first concept draft," Miyoshi adds, "we had this idea of creating a game where, as the theme of *Burning Rangers*, the player would have to rescue people. As one aspect of that idea, we wanted to incorporate the excitement and image of typical Hollywood films in our game, and to do that we decided on a game style with heroic characters who would bravely negotiate explosions and fires in order to save lives."

IRONICALLY – AND REGRETTABLY in light of the Saturn's incidental role in the ultimate demise of Sega as a hardware manufacturer – *Burning Rangers'* message of survival was issued too late in the 32-bit platform's lifetime for it to ever receive due gratitude from its host machine. Nine months to the day after *Burning Rangers'* Japanese release, Sega birthed Dreamcast. Saturn was left behind and *Burning Rangers* was largely forgotten before it even had a chance to properly establish its merits. Its plight was further hindered by the indifference of many Saturn owners at that late stage in the format's life, when third-party support had all but evaporated and even its staunchest supporters in print – most notably Emap's *Official Sega Saturn Magazine* – were about to be discontinued.

However, Sonic Team's initial concept work on *Burning Rangers* began in the autumn of 1996 when the Saturn was still in with a realistic chance of finishing higher than last (read: third) place in the 32-/64-bit console race. Development of *Burning Rangers* was swift, building on three-dimensional game production techniques learned during Sonic Team's work on *NiGHTS*, which was out of the door by May 1996. However, in retrospect it's easy to stamp the whole project as a misfortunate victim of bad timing. "From the initial planning stage to release, *Burning Rangers* took us about a year and a half," Miyoshi recalls, "although the actual development and coding was done in less than a year. There were 31 people on the team: three game planners, six programmers, twenty designers, and two sound producers."

Prior to beginning work on the game proper, Sonic Team's programmers and designers took care to evaluate the potential for fire effects and explosion routines, which were crucial to the complete realisation of *Burning Rangers'* design brief. Although obviously limited by the modest rendering capabilities of the Saturn hardware, *Burning Rangers'* blazes

Burning Rangers used transparency effects and lighting, which were rarities in the field of Saturn game development, to achieve some remarkably pretty infernos.

IT WAS FORGOTTEN BEFORE IT HAD A CHANCE TO PROPERLY ESTABLISH ITS MERITS

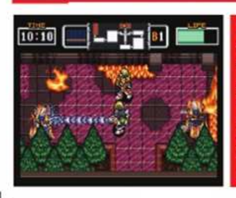






These character sketches can also be found on the official *Burning Rangers* website, which is amazingly now in its tenth year.

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Human's 1994 2D Super Famicom title *The Firemen* provided a clear example of the possibilities of team-based firefighting gameplay.



Irem's PS2 survival-rescue crossover *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* (aka *SOS: The Final Escape*) revisited *Burning Rangers'* themes in a more realistic environment.



We Are Burning Rangers



WE ARE BURNING Rangers, included in the double jewel case of *Burning Rangers'* Japanese pressing, was a three-track three-inch CD containing the theme song, penned by Naofumi Hataya, along with cuts of opening theme *Burning Rangers Angel Of Fire*, and ending theme *I Just Smile*. The full soundtrack CD (sold separately) now fetches in excess of ¥12,000 on the Japanese game CD market. This is either a clear indication of its scarcity or a consequence of the music's magical pop-jazz-gum power. To quote from the wisdom of *We Are Burning Rangers*: "They will never let you down / Max power Burning Rangers / Wow / Don't lose your hope now".



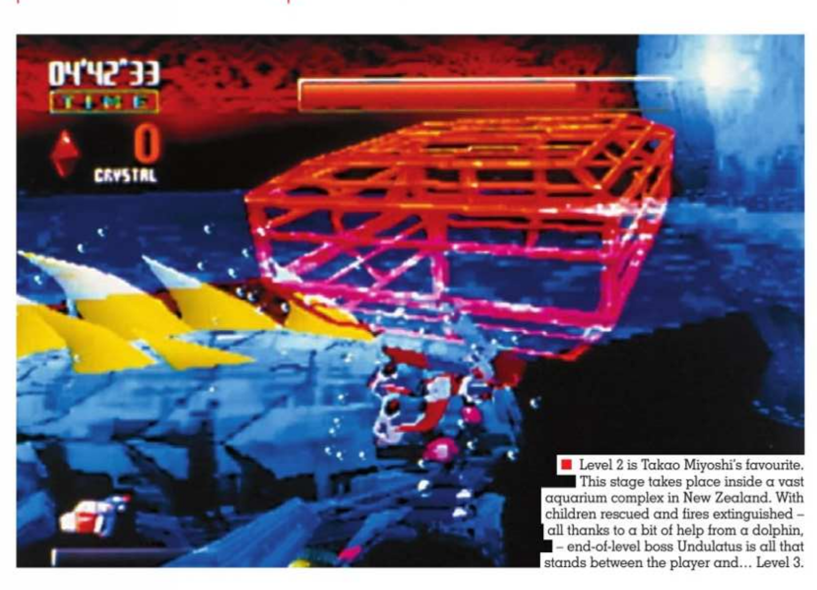
retain a surprising degree of dramatic effect when seen today: blocky sprites are cleverly disguised with seemingly authentic patterns of movement, transparency, and lighting effects, and the use of multiple tones of fire.

Miyoshi explains the impetus that propelled development beyond the initial *Burning Rangers* concept: "We spent quite a lot of time during the testing phase just checking how far we would be able take the flame effects – how pretty we could make the game's fires. In the first test ROM we produced, we were able to achieve some quite beautiful fire effects, so we felt we could go with this idea."

The great strength of the Saturn hardware was its sprite-pushing power, and only a handful of its 3D games – tellingly those produced in-house at Sega by its most talented teams – were technically proficient to the point of attracting envious looks from PlayStation and Nintendo 64 owners: Team Andromeda's work on the *Panzer Dragoon* series; AM3's mightily impressive Saturn conversions of *Sega Rally Championship* and Virtual ON; AM2's *Fighters Megamix*; and Sonic Team's *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Burning Rangers* all provided powerful examples of 3D gaming on a 2D-orientated format.

Miyoshi is rightly proud of his team's work with *Burning Rangers*, noting that few contemporary games, whether on the Saturn or on other platforms, were as ambitious. "At that time there were very few games that used polygons in three-dimensional spaces for acrobatic gameplay and permitted exploration. I think *Burning Rangers* was noteworthy in that it did both of these things."

If anything though, Sonic Team was over-ambitious with its design work here. The frame rate was inconsistent, generally struggling to reach 30fps, and that did occasionally impact on control of the Rangers. As a result of frame rate issues and convoluted level layouts, *Burning Rangers* felt disorientating,



■ Level 2 is Takao Miyoshi's favourite. This stage takes place inside a vast aquarium complex in New Zealand. With children rescued and fires extinguished – all thanks to a bit of help from a dolphin, – end-of-level boss Undulatus is all that stands between the player and… Level 3.



■ Takao Miyoshi remains at Sonic Team to this day and continues to work on franchise titles. Perhaps he'll make a *Burning Rangers* sequel in the future.

THE GREAT STRENGTH OF THE SATURN HARDWARE WAS ITS SPRITE-PUSHING POWER

even dizzying at times. By holding the Saturn controller's Y button, it was possible to stand still and take a 360-degree look around the environment – a welcome feature that enabled the player to regain a sense of direction. However, this facility could only ever provide brief respite and was rendered dangerous because of the constant threat of fire breaking out in the vicinity of a stationary Ranger. Exacerbating the situation was the absence of a map. Sonic Team made a conscious decision not to include such a feature – the payoff was spoken navigation assistance.

■■■ **INSTEAD OF OFFERING** any visible 'You are here' style crutch, Sonic Team dispensed with years of adventure game tradition, replacing maps and diagrams with audible guidance from fellow Burning Rangers. Not only did this neatly emphasise the game's ethos of teamwork and support, but it also served to amplify the senses of tension and fear. Miyoshi elaborates: "We made a specific point of developing the game's sound – particularly the voice acting – and the audio navigation system in such a way that we could fully convey the sense of being in a 3D space, and of being caught up in a dramatic scenario."

By pressing X or Z, the player's Ranger character was able to call other team members for help, receiving instant responses along the lines of 'Keep on walking down that corridor and turn left at the end, but beware of flames bursting from the doorway'. This support was so important that *Burning Rangers'* first loading screen carried a reminder to warn players that the game featured an audio navigation system and was therefore best played with the sound on.

In the final build of the game, professional voice actors played the roles of the Burning Rangers and those rescued by them (inevitably the Japanese cast and script generated a significantly more assured **CONTINUED >.**



What They Said...



Each stage features some intricate and visually astounding level design, with Sonic Team pulling out all the stops to create some incredible set pieces, the likes of which Saturn owners have never seen before

Sega Saturn Magazine, Issue 29, March 1998



performance than the dodgy translation and English dub of the PAL release), but Sonic Team had to make do with its own placeholder sound files during development, as Miyoshi wryly reminisces. "We had a lot of fun with the alpha and beta versions of *Burning Rangers*, as we sampled our own voices for characters in those builds. It was really amusing to hear close friends and colleagues crying for help and saying things like, 'Thanks for rescuing me' and 'I'm still scared'."

Rescuing the helpless was a significant aspect of the game, and Sonic Team made a point of emphasising the communication between the Burning Rangers and the beneficiaries of their lifesaving services, where those rescued would write notes of gratitude and send passwords – which could be used to unlock special game features – as virtual presents. Miyoshi's favourite aspect of *Burning Rangers* is the correspondence between these two parties: "I really like the fact that you receive emails from the people you've rescued, and also the way things are set up randomly so that you can receive passwords after rescuing 'rare' victims." Among those to be rescued were Sonic Team leaders Yuji Naka and Naoto Oshima, and soundtrack composer Naofumi Hataya.

The music employed in *Burning Rangers* was in many ways typical of mid-Nineties Japanese anime soundtracks: bursting with positive thoughts (see We Are Burning Rangers) and overloaded with synthpop flourishes. "Naofumi Hataya composed his music to suit the overall game concept," Miyoshi reveals. "Rather than writing pieces in reaction to specific scenarios. The soundtrack was actually re-written several times during the development of *Burning Rangers*, so the audio work gradually began to evolve alongside the team's production of the game itself."

OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES of *Burning Rangers* included the game's use of colour coding to explain the severity of individual situations, whereby the status of doors (ranging from accessible, inaccessible and requiring a switch to be hit to open them, and locked) could be ascertained with a glance at the colour of the doorway – with blue, yellow, or red each signifying something to the player. Similarly, the strength of fires was linked to the colour of the flames (orange, blue, green, or pink), and areas where heat was building up in or behind walls were likewise described in various tones according to the level of danger presented.


TAKAO MIYOSHI
Game Designer

Control of the Burning Rangers was, as Miyoshi puts it, "Acrobatic". A quick tap of down on the D-pad/analogue pad (see Analogue X Digital) worked to create a nifty backward somersault, for example, which was endlessly useful in escaping from sudden bursts of flames. Interestingly, *Burning Rangers* pre-empted *Ocarina Of Time*'s automatic jumping system to remove the danger of accidentally falling through small- to medium-sized gaps in the flooring, although

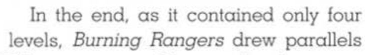


A basic training mode prior to Level 1 ensured that the player mastered the unusual controls and acrobatic character movement before entering red-hot danger zones. The lectures here were fully voiced, setting a precedent for the rest of the game.

THE MUSIC WAS TYPICAL OF MID-NINETIES JAPANESE ANIME SOUNDTRACKS

each of the Burning Rangers could jump (and boost in mid-air to perform a double-jump) in order to scale higher locations.

Despite this, Sonic Team had gameplay ideas to spare once the final *Burning Rangers* ROM had been sent to the disc-pressing factory. A combination of time restraints and hardware limitations meant that some promising features were ultimately impossible to work into the game. "We really wanted to include more set pieces that showed the teamwork of the Burning Rangers," Miyoshi admits. "For example, in one scene where Shou was trapped in a small room, we were planning to suddenly give the player control of Big Landman, who would have needed to enter the room from an adjacent area by destroying the wall between him and Shou, and then Big would have secured an escape route for Shou. We wanted to include a system where brief side stories such as this would be collected."



In the end, as it contained only four levels, *Burning Rangers* drew parallels with *NiGHTS* for its assumed brevity. But the notion that *Burning Rangers* and *NiGHTS* failed to offer a sufficient volume of gameplay is quite ludicrous – both games could be replayed in imaginative and interesting ways, and both used lettered grading systems to provide clear incentives for self-improvement. *Burning Rangers* even went so far as



■ *Burning Rangers* was fully compatible with the Saturn's '3D' analogue controller, but Sonic Team's priority in development was to calibrate the game for effective control with the standard (digital) Saturn pad. The game still plays better with analogue control.



■ Sonic Team deliberately opted out of including a map on the screen overlay. The graph indicates how dangerous the area is becoming, and how close the danger is to hitting a predefined limit.

to offer a random level generator upon defeating its final boss, remixing its four basic levels with a seemingly endless variety of layout alterations and random positioning of victims and level furniture.

■■■ **WE ASK MIYOSHI** which stage he was most pleased with. "The offshore facility stage, the second level. That scene with the dolphin left a lasting impression on me." It had a similar effect on us, too, and we would encourage you to search for a Saturn copy of *Burning Rangers* to experience this (and other set pieces, including the three-dimensional tunnel-based shoot-'em-up mini-game) for yourself. We would, that is, were it not for the likelihood of *Burning Rangers* being remade in the near future. Sega's current remake policy doesn't seem to make a lot of sense, with *NiGHTS* being remade on the PlayStation 2 but only released in Japan, and *Sega Bass Fishing* being remade… full stop. But there's no doubting the fact that Sega deserves more from *Burning Rangers*, and if that necessitates a remake in some form, so be it.

It's surprising that subsequent games have generally neglected to use sound in such an uncompromising way as pioneered by *Burning Rangers*. Only *Soundvoyager* – released in 2006 on Game Boy Advance as part of Nintendo's Japan-exclusive bit Generations series – springs to mind as a game outside the rhythm-action field that forces its players to listen in order to progress, and that experiment also worked wonderfully well. Similarly, the rescue-survival theme in such a humane form has largely disappeared, with only Irem's very enjoyable *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* games managing to vaguely replicate the heart-warming nature of *Burning Rangers*. There are many lessons that can be learned from *Burning Rangers* for players and developers alike. Perhaps it was ahead of its time, or maybe its time is yet to come.

Analogue X Digital

Controller design decisions

ALTHOUGH IT NEVER became a standard in the manner of Sony's subsequent Dual Shock or Nintendo's N64 controller, the Saturn's analogue controller (curiously described by Sega as a "3D controller") was originally built for use with *NiGHTS* but was also fully compatible with *Burning Rangers*. We ask Takao Miyoshi whether Sonic Team designed *Burning Rangers* primarily for the standard Saturn controller, or for the analogue pad. "We developed the game with the normal Saturn controller in mind, to make sure it was fully playable with that. That was our priority," clarifies Miyoshi. Strangely, we reckon the game has always felt more natural when played with the analogue controller…





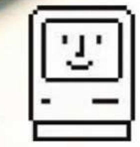
■ Shou and Tillis, *Burning Rangers'* two leading characters, were charismatic and easily identifiable. Other members of the Burning Rangers team also came into play, while off-screen support was given through radio contact.


Mac OS
Starting up...

Fruit Machines

The history of Apple gaming

games™ explores Apple's chequered gaming roots, from the Apple II through to the recent success of the App Store



NOVEMBER 2006. THEN-Palm CEO Ed Colligan makes a statement about Apple's iPhone that will forever haunt him. "We've learned and struggled for a few years here figuring out how to make a decent phone," he said. "PC guys are not going to just figure this out. They're not going to just walk in."

But Apple surprised everyone and did just that; and the iPhone laid the groundwork for a gaming revolution – removing the 'phone' led to the iPod Touch. Adding the App Store resulted in thousands of games being released via a flourishing ecosystem reminiscent of the Eighties indie games scene and, what's more, millions of happy consumers were buying more games than ever before, due to their low price points.

Seemingly from nowhere, Apple is a major player in gaming. But, again, should we be surprised? Apple's success might well seem a combination of fluke, digital distribution marketing savvy and aggressive expansion into the mobile marketplace, but Apple has always dipped a toe into the murky waters of videogaming.

Apple's beginnings were in the hobbyist market. Co-founder Steve Wozniak had wowed by designing a *Breakout* prototype so technically advanced that Atari had to double the number of chips to manufacture the game itself. Wozniak's technical savvy then birthed the Apple I, a basic home computer where



ROTTEN APPLE

APPLE'S MADE MISSTEPS, but few out-and-out blunders. The Pippin was an exception. The Apple-designed multimedia platform, produced by Bandai, arrived in 1996. It vaguely resembled the Dreamcast (which arrived two years later), but was beset by more disasters than even Sega's ill-fated machine.

Apple intended to license the technology, but Pippin was launched into a highly competitive market. Touted as a cheap computer, it was instead recognised as a $599 console, and sold just 42,000 units. Fewer than 20 games were released in the US, and the device rapidly vanished from stores. "It was a case of bad timing and architecture," thinks John Romero. "Pippin was like an earlier version of what Microsoft did with Xbox, except the architecture was bad."

Ex-Apple evangelist Craig Fryar agrees, as he says: "Pippin was strange in the context of the broader games market. Other companies put extreme focus into graphics chips with high throughput to the main CPU – things dedicated to gaming. It didn't seem Pippin could hold its own."

Despite being a failure, Pippin gained some fans. Sebastien Angulo runs a Pippin website (**http://web.mac.com/sebangulo/Pippin/**) and reckons "the idea of a small all-in-one games-capable, internet-enabled device was ahead of its time." But even Angulo admits a lack of killer games meant Pippin never stood a chance. "It could have been great, but was flawed by a high price, low customer interest and a lack of 3D games, which the PlayStation had at the time."

the user had to supply a keyboard, monitor, transformer and case.

The Apple II arrived a year later and offered high-res graphics, sound capabilities and, importantly, you didn't have to put the thing together yourself. "At the time, I thought computers were the coolest thing in the world, and I was a videogame addict," recalls Brian Greenstone, founder of Pangea Software. "The Apple II was the PC of its day, and it was the platform to work on." He recalls not disliking anything about the machine, but admits the bar was set low in the late Seventies. 'Just having black, white, blue, orange, green and purple was plenty back then, and the basic audio seemed magical. The best thing was you could turn the Apple II on and start writing BASIC. Doing assembly was easy, too, because the 6502 only had a handful of registers and commands."

The platform also fascinated a young John Romero, who says early Apple II games he sampled – *David's Midnight Magic*, *Castle Wolfenstein*, *Gorgon*, *Sabotage* – made him want to learn to program. "It was a wonderful machine, and I saw its limitations as challenges to overcome. It was rewarding working with a computer that rewarded you more when you put time into learning it. I loved how much there was to learn, from the ROM to DOS/ProDOS to 6502 coding to advanced techniques for rendering. To me, the Apple II was pure magic."

DAN GORLIN, CREATOR of *Choplifter*, wasn't so enamoured, saying he "in a way disliked everything about the Apple II," complaining about the lack of any means to make music or sound effects other than with the CPU, so everything had to stop while sound was being made. "But one thing I did enjoy was having absolute control over timing. Everything was real-time – no hardware interrupts or other programs running – so you could polish timing perfectly." Romero reckons the Apple II's "peculiar limitations" merely dictated the kind of games you could make, as he says: "Other platforms, like the C64 and Atari 800, were superior for action games, because they had hardware for graphics and sound. But the games looked similar, because they were rendering through the same API, the same graphics chip. The Apple II had no hardware for that, so programmers had to invent their own ways of getting graphics on the screen."

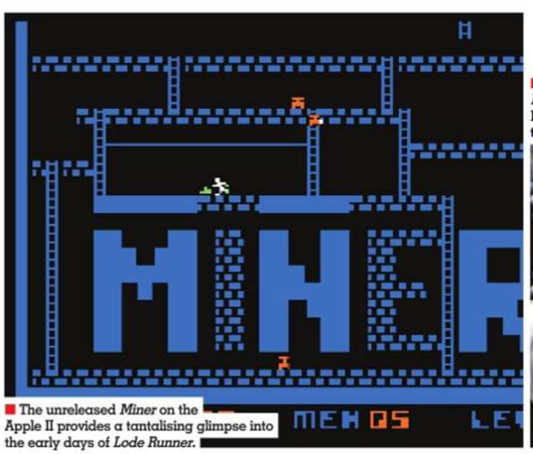
Romero says varied approaches led to a vast array of rendering techniques that provided you with unique identification of a programmer – you could tell who wrote each game. This, he thinks, made the Apple II a platform where a creator could express their creativity, with a very open canvas. And while other platforms surpassed the Apple II in the games market, Apple's machine still had plenty to offer: various *Ultimas*, *Night Mission Pinball* and *Pinball Construction Set*, *Flight Simulator*, *Star Blazer*, *Karateka*, *Lode Runner*, *Choplifter* – all great games at home on the Apple II.

> **"THE APPLE II OFFERED HIGH-RES GRAPHICS AND SOUND CAPABILITIES"**

As the Apple II aged, Apple updated the line, with the Apple IIe in 1983 and the Apple IIGS, a 16-bit offering that retained backwards compatibility with its forerunners. However, despite a loyal user base, the platform was gradually eclipsed by the Macintosh.

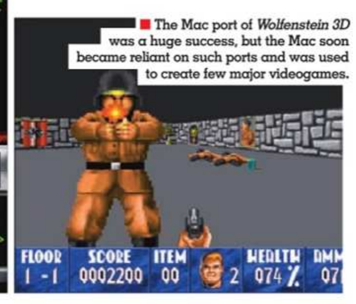
Not everyone made the leap. Gorlin recalls obvious contenders at the time for the next gaming platform were the Mac and Amiga, but the Mac's black-and-white display put him off. Romero adds that Apple's success in the publishing industry caused Macs to become 'typecast', and many Apple games developers made a surprising jump to the PC. Greenstone recalls the same, as he says: "It was weird – in high school, no one would use a PC, but in the late Eighties everyone ditched Apple IIs and bought PCs." Wanting nothing to do with command-line interfaces and "primitive graphics and audio on the PC," Greenstone decided the Mac was the technical winner, but Apple's support for videogames was decidedly sporadic.

Craig Fryar worked in evangelism at Apple in the early Nineties and recalls that the late Eighties saw a strange strategic decision from Apple. The company opted to concentrate on the professional market at the expense of hobbyists that had made the company a success in

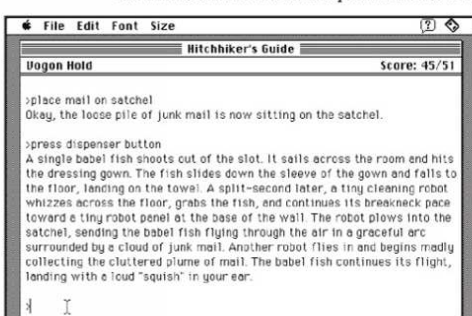


The unreleased *Miner* on the Apple II provides a tantalising glimpse into the early days of *Lode Runner*.

The Bungie guys released the *Marathon* trilogy as freeware in 2004. Point your browser at **http://trilogyrelease.bungie.org/**.



The Mac port of *Wolfenstein 3D* was a huge success, but the Mac soon became reliant on such ports and was used to create few major videogames.



■ Douglas Adams was a huge fan of the Mac, and so it's fitting that *The Hitchhiker's Guide* release for the system worked so well.

the first place. "This undercut Apple's credibility and ability to attract software developers. Apple's corporate focus put a dampener on things."

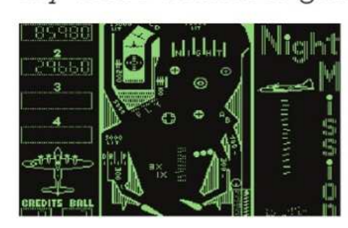
Despite apathy from Apple, and a worry from the company that significant investment in gaming would make people perceive Macs as 'toys', gaming on the platform wasn't entirely defeated. Fryar and like-minded colleagues convinced management that spreadsheets alone couldn't show off hardware, but graphically intensive applications – games – could. "Things changed. I started putting together engineering support and secured $150,000 of systems to feed to developers, in exchange for them showing off hardware features," recalls Fryar, citing *Hellcats Over the Pacific* from Graphic Simulations, which offered a three-monitor version, highlighting the Mac's multiple monitor capabilities.

■■■ THERE WAS A resurgence in Mac gaming. Mac-specific gaming labels were set up to make a better job of Mac games and bring top titles to the platform. Bill Dugan, then a producer at Interplay, says the company recognised common problems with Mac games. "In the Eighties, videogames were developed on a lead platform, released immediately and ported to whatever platforms would sell," he recalls. "But with the Mac, Amiga and ST, they had better graphics and a different visual interface, based on pointing and clicking, whereas most people still used keyboard commands. Mac games were often direct ports, lacking mouse interfaces, or had 'fake' mouse interfaces to click on keyboard command equivalents, so in the lower levels of code the programmer could use the same UI they'd written for the C64 or PC."

Noticing how influential Mac publications rallied against such shortcomings, Brian Fargo, president of Interplay, realised that by spending more effort on presentation, user interface and graphics, Interplay could make its games more attractive to Mac owners. "An important part of this was a 'line look' at retail, and so we created the MacPlay brand," says Dugan. "Brian envisioned Mac owners walking into a computer store and seeing rows of MacPlay games. Although the Mac category was small, he thought we could dominate it, since nobody else was doing this. And a block of games would help us sell it into retail, at a time when most stores were becoming reluctant to buy Mac games."

Six of the best

Try these standout games for ancient Apple systems



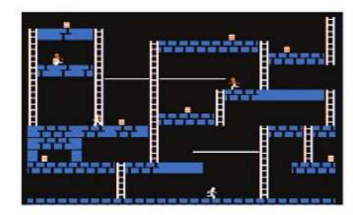
Night Mission

■ Romero describes this pinball game as "Bruce Artwick's masterpiece," and who are we to argue? It might not look much today, but *Night Mission*'s table design is timeless, and clever blurring effects bring some serious speed to the game. Artwick also created *Flight Simulator*, which evolved into *Microsoft Flight Simulator*.



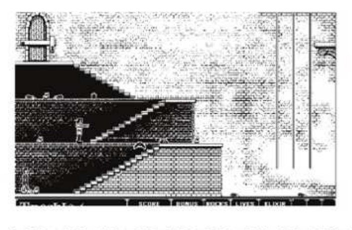
Choplifter

■ Dan Gorlin's helicopter rescue game became popular enough to escape its Apple II roots and be ported to several home platforms of the day, and also to the arcades. Great graphics and sound (for the time) combine with perfect controls to make a top action game. And while the game's simple, saving all 64 hostages is challenging.



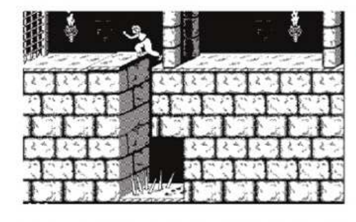
Lode Runner

■ Starting out life on mainframes, *Lode Runner* came to life on the Apple II. Doug Smith's first crack at the game proper was the unreleased *Miner*. Rejected by Brøderbund, Smith polished the graphics and controls and Brøderbund changed its mind. Oddly, there's no iPod Touch version, but one exists for clickwheel iPods.



Dark Castle

■ This 1986 platform game designed by Mark 'Klax' Pierce remains a firm favourite of everyone we spoke to. Its hard-as-nails, uncompromising gameplay means it today comes across like the Mac equivalent of *Jet Set Willy*. But if you can persevere, it's a decent game with wonderful graphic design and amusing samples.



Prince of Persia

■ The series began life on the Apple II, but the original game's creator Jordan Mechner favours the Mac port. Programmer Scott Shumway went all out, creating multiple graphics sets to ensure the game was optimised for mono and colour Macs. The attention to detail meant it was a top seller – even outselling the PC release.



Marathon

■ This 1994 first-person shooter laid the groundwork for *Halo*. Unlike similar products from the early Nineties, *Marathon* provides an engrossing story throughout, told in chunks via computer terminals peppered throughout the game's atmospheric levels. While *Marathon* looks clunky today, it still plays well.

THE APPLE CORP



Steve Wozniak
■ Apple co-founder Woz was the brains behind *Breakout*. Technology from Woz's Atari prototype informed the Apple I and Apple II designs, the latter proving successful in the games market.

Bill Budge


■ Budge's early Apple II pinball efforts inspired many programmers. Despite the Apple II not being designed to support fast graphics and collision detection, Budge's 1981 release *Raster Blaster* offered a high-res pinball table.

Nasir Gebelli
■ Gebelli pioneered a number of advanced graphics techniques on the Apple II, using them to bring arcade games of the day to the platform (such as *Defender* clone, *Gorgon*). Gabelli created over a dozen games in three years. He later joined Squaresoft in Japan where he helped program *Final Fantasy* and *Secret Of Mana*.



Jordan Mechner
■ Mechner wasn't prolific on Apple machines, but Apple II game *Karateka* was an early example of a game to offer a cinematic feel, and follow-up *Prince of Persia* survives in various forms to this day.

Silas Warner
■ Warner's *Castle Wolfenstein* was the first stealth shooter, and it – along with sequel *Beyond Castle Wolfenstein* – ultimately inspired id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D*. He also created quirky low-res pyromaniac sim Firebug, before moving to the C64 and other platforms.

Doug Smith


■ He might have been a one-game wonder on the Apple II (well, one series), but what a game: *Lode Runner* spawned a slew of imitators and a pile of sequels, and variations on the game are available for almost every platform.



Brian Fargo
■ The president of Interplay and founder of MacPlay was a driving force behind bringing more games to the Mac platform. MacPlay for brought many classics to the Mac, and the label was resurrected for a second stint in 2000.

Peter Tamte
■ Tamte launched Infogrames division MacSoft to bring quality PC titles to the Mac. He subsequently worked for Apple as director of worldwide consumer marketing, for Bungie, and then founded Destineer, which in 2003 bought MacSoft from Infogrames



Brian Greenstone
■ Although starting out on the Apple IIGS, Greenstone's Pangea Software was most famous for its Mac games, many of which were Mac-only 3D efforts. One such game, *Nanosaur*, was for years bundled with iMacs.

Andrew Welch


■ Welch launched Ambrosia Software, bringing arcade-style games to the Mac, which lacked such games. The company subsequently created the *Escape Velocity* series, and recently ported *Darwinia* and *DEFCON* to the Mac.

Steve Jobs
■ Without Jobs there would be no Apple. But importantly, it was his return in '96 that reignited the company's interest in the consumer space. This led to the iPod Touch, which many consider today's standout gaming platform.

Like programmers on the Apple II, Dugan and co took advantage of the platform's perceived limitations. "Graphics were a brighter spot for Mac games than you'd expect, because early Mac black-and-white monitors made it unconscionable for a publisher to simply copy and paste graphics from another platform – you would have ended up with a lumpy, dithered mess of unacceptable grey. Therefore, almost everyone re-created graphics for the Mac version. Strangely, subsequent colour Macs made a few developers create games that looked worse than necessary, because a publisher decided the Commodore 64 graphics looked fine on a Mac!"

No such problems afflicted MacPlay, which worked on many notable ports. "I liked our Mac versions of *Out of This World* and *Wolfenstein 3D*. Our graphics looked great at all the window sizes we offered, during a time when many games just had 320 x 200px windows and a mode at 640 x 400 that just doubled the pixel sizes."

Interplay wasn't the only company noticing the Mac – other labels started porting the best PC games. MacSoft president Peter Tamte says the label was founded in 1993 primarily due to his own frustrations. "I wanted to play more games on the Mac! So we approached big publishers to license their best games. After showing how profitable these games were and how the original publishers were getting new fans without diluting their brands, we could bring more games to the Mac from a wider selection of publishers."

IT WAS A time of relative prosperity for Mac games companies. Sales and visibility of Mac games increased, and Fryar thinks, given the constraints evangelists were working within, they couldn't have done a better job. "The gaming community was a willing partner in wanting to support the platform," he says. "They saw the creative and consumer segment Apple had a history in and had excelled at, and responded well to the attention we gave them in supporting the platform."

But as the Nineties progressed, things again headed downhill. Apple was never truly dedicated to the gaming space, and hadn't created affordable



■ *Crystal Quest* is a fast-paced mouse-controlled collection/shooter game, originally released for the Mac in 1987.







■ *Karateka* on the Apple II was one of the earliest videogames to integrate cinematic cut-scenes.

MODERN RETRO

Apple favourites and tributes available for the iPod Touch and iPhone

Saucelifter



■ Switch generic bad guys and a heroic chopper captain for a fearless UFO pilot out to save his alien chums from evil humans and you've got this fantastic *Choplifter* update. Tilt controls, three-way firing and a gorgeous night/day cycle confirm the game as simply an essential purchase.

The Oregon Trail



■ This educational title, designed to teach children about the life of 19th Century pioneers, twangs the nostalgia strings of aged Apple gamers, having made its mark on the Apple II. The update from Gameloft brings the presentation up to date but leaves the original gameplay intact.

hardware attuned to showing off the platform for high-end entertainment. Publishers increasingly snubbed Apple's 'consumer' hardware, due to these high price points. Once again Apple pulled back on the consumer side, and a vicious circle became increasingly apparent – a declining installed base led to lower sales, causing games publishers to ignore the Mac.

Over time, the number of major original Mac titles dwindled. For every *Marathon* there were dozens of titles on the PC. "We say 'games sell systems', and the gamers' games were getting invented on the PC," says Dugan. "id Software released *Wolfenstein 3D* on the PC in 1992 and *Doom* in 1993, and the budgets kept creeping up. The PC was always the lead platform." Despite Apple being asked to fund Mac game development to attempt to expand the category, it never did.

The contrast between Mac and PC became stark. Mac games were fewer in number and arrived later. It was common to see new games arrive for the Mac as PC originals reached the bargain bins. The later availability of games started driving gamers from the platform.

In 1996, the Pippin (see 'Rotten Apple') cemented a belief that Apple simply didn't know what it was doing regarding gaming, and financial problems elsewhere within the company had driven it to the brink of bankruptcy. "A big transition away from the Mac occurred," recalls Greenstone. "Developers left in droves, and when Apple recovered there was no one left aside from a few groups of people porting old PC games to the Mac." For Greenstone's Pangea, this position could be exploited. "We stayed around and pretty much owned the market for a period of time." And so the indies plugged the gaming gap as best they could with original IP, occasionally battling infrequent big-name ports that came to the platform.

Dugan thinks this sorry state was of Apple's making: "The original Mac crew didn't think games were important compared to other types of software, and the price tags of Macs in those days were sufficient to make this point. The 'consumer' colour Macs were slow and expensive compared to PCs, and so consumers voted with their feet and went elsewhere."

TODAY'S APPLE IS far from the confused, fragile company of the mid-Nineties. Steve Jobs returned, became CEO in 1997 and set about ruthlessly streamlining Apple's offerings. This time, the company wasn't 'professional' or 'consumer', just one that offered great, usable products across the board.

The iMac revitalised Apple's fortunes in home computing, and the iPod revolutionised the portable music-player market. Recently, the iPhone and iPod Touch turned Apple into a major player in gaming, and even if, as Fryar claims, "by necessity Apple had to address the entertainment requirement of the mobile market," it's a nice side effect to have thousands of games to play on Apple mobile hardware.

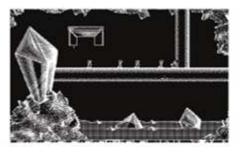
But how much of Apple's handheld device success will rub off on the Mac itself? "None whatsoever. The platforms are too different. iPhone may steal away Mac games developers, but it won't spawn new ones," claims Greenstone, adding that Pangea Software, which left the Mac games market in 2006, won't be returning.

"THE IPHONE AND IPOD TOUCH TURNED APPLE INTO A MAJOR PLAYER IN GAMING"

Tamte also cites the "horrible state of Windows gaming," saying piracy, low-end graphics hardware and the explosion of console gaming means PCs are no longer where the big bucks are. With fewer great Windows games to bring to the Mac, he thinks the Mac will suffer.

Others are more optimistic. Gedeon Maheux of developer Iconfactory reckons as the Mac's market share continues to grow and the iPhone draws more people to Apple products, demand will mean more games for the platform. And Romero concludes with a simple reminder to anyone considering Apple in its various flavours for gaming, as he says: "Apple makes hardware for gaming – it's that simple. Now everyone just needs to support it."


Prince of Persia on the Mac had alternate graphics sets and outsold the PC version.


Ambrosia founder Andrew Welch enjoyed programming and wanted more Mac games. His first release, in 1993, was *Astroids* tribute *Maelstrom*.


Lemmings had alternate modes, depending on which Mac you used. The Mac Plus release resembles the Spectrum version.



Crystal Quest

On Macs, *Crystal Quest* plays like a crazed version of *Robotron*, without the luxury of dual-thumb controls. This remake does the same, replacing mouse controls with the device's accelerometer. Collect the crystals, shoot the bad guys and try not to die – easier said than done!



Myst

This graphic adventure went from being a surprise success on the Mac to holding the 'biggest selling PC game' record until *The Sims* arrived. The handheld version is perfectly reassembled from the original, although at 0.5GB, you'll need plenty of space on your device to play it.



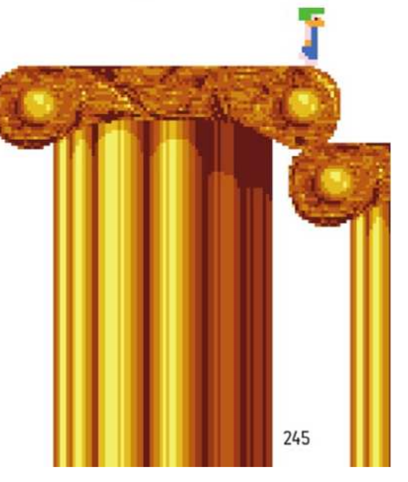
SimCity

Embraced as a Mac original, *SimCity* remains a much-loved city-building simulator. The iPhone version is based on *SimCity 3000*, released for the Mac in 1999. Despite a slightly iffy interface and some stability issues, it's still a worthy purchase for fans of the genre.



The Secret of Monkey Island

The Mac was a launch platform for Lucasfilm's SCUMM favourite in 1990. The iPhone version retains everything (including, annoyingly, a cursor), and enables you to swipe between the special edition and classic modes at any time.



Hall Of Fame… Chocobo

Forget Epona, Agro and Yoshi, the most iconic and cherished videogame steed may just be Final Fantasy's original feathered friend

IF THE LONG-RUNNING *Final Fantasy* series has one distinguishing feature it's the fact that each of its 14 landmark entries is a completely self-contained episode, never repeating characters, setting or story from one game to the next. Starting with a clear slate each time, there are few constants that tie the series together: the customary use of the names Cid, Biggs and Wedge, the reappearance of certain species such as the Moogle and, of course, the Chocobo.

Introduced in 1988's *Final Fantasy II* on Famicom, the Chocobo appears in just one forest and can be used as a quick mode of transport in the local area. Standing in for horses, which appear extremely rarely throughout the series, the yellow-feathered bird made for a much more imaginative steed that perfectly fit Squaresoft's unique interpretation of the typical RPG universe.

As that first Chocobo gave *Final Fantasy II* a personality distinct from any other RPG of the time, it was no surprise to see the chirpy yellow mount reappear in nearly every subsequent title. And with each appearance, the significance of our feathered friend increased. With more Chocobo forests cropping up in the game worlds, it became easier to find a bird and use it to travel over the continent – the bonus being that their use negates random encounters.

Subsequent games allowed you to fight against rogue Chocobo or even summon them to aid with powerful attacks in battle. *Final Fantasy IV* on the SNES introduced new breeds of Chocobo, signified by either white or black plumage, that each benefited from their own unique abilities. But it was the epic *Final Fantasy VII* that most fleshed out the role of the Chocobo in the *Final Fantasy* universe.

Final Fantasy VII was, for many Europeans, their first taste of the JRPG and therefore their introduction to the loveable Chocobo. And what an introduction it was, as Squaresoft spent more effort than ever before to make the Chocobo an integral part of the experience with *Final Fantasy VII*. For the first time, players could catch wild Chocobo and keep them in stables for future use. Here they could be crossbred with other Chocobo and fed different types of food in order to breed new colours including blue, green, black and even gold. Each of these breeds featured unique abilities, the blue Chocobo could run through water, green could traverse mountains, black Chocobos could do both and the gold Chocobo could do both while also being able to cross the ocean.

As well inheriting all-terrain skills, the different-coloured birds could also be put to use in the Chocobo Races at the Gold Saucer resort, which had to be won in order to complete a major part of the main quest. Just being able to breed the best Chocobo required hours of experimentation between the different variables of the two Chocobo mates and their food. So, it was hardly surprising to see lengthy and detailed breeding guides turn up on the internet and in the gaming magazines of the day.

THE COMPLEXITY OF the Chocobo's gameplay was mercifully reduced in future games, but the bird remained no less popular. In 1997 the creature received its first spin-off game, *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon*, which put you in control of a bird called Poulet in a roguelike RPG. A sequel followed, as well as a *Mario Kart*-style racing game, a DS mini-game collection called *Chocobo Tales* and a recent return to the dungeon genre on WiiWare.

Chocobo's spin-off games saw the cute bird made even more cute and cartoonish, attracting a younger audience and allowing Squaresoft to make millions in kid-friendly merchandise. In the main *Final Fantasy* games, however, the design remained relatively realistic. And as the series crossed over onto PlayStation 2, the increased power of the hardware brought more sophisticated visuals and saw the Chocobo redesigned to look even more believable and realistically proportioned.

Countless appearances, spin-off games, and merchandise all attest to the evergreen popularity of the RPG's most famous steed, but if there's one factor that shows just how popular the Chocobo is with fans then it's the history of the bird's use in *Final Fantasy XI*. First released in 2002, it took four years of repeated requests and petitions before Square Enix incorporated Chocobo breeding into the game and another year before racing was also added to the MMO.

Square Enix seems to have learned its lesson now. *Final Fantasy XIV* is the second online *Final Fantasy* game to be announced and its debut trailer, shown at E3 2009, clearly showed a Chocobo in action, hinting that the developers know just how important the creature is to RPG fans and that he won't be going away any time soon.

>. MAGIC MOMENTS



Edgar makes a daring escape from Figaro castle in *FF VI* by jumping on a moving Chocobo.



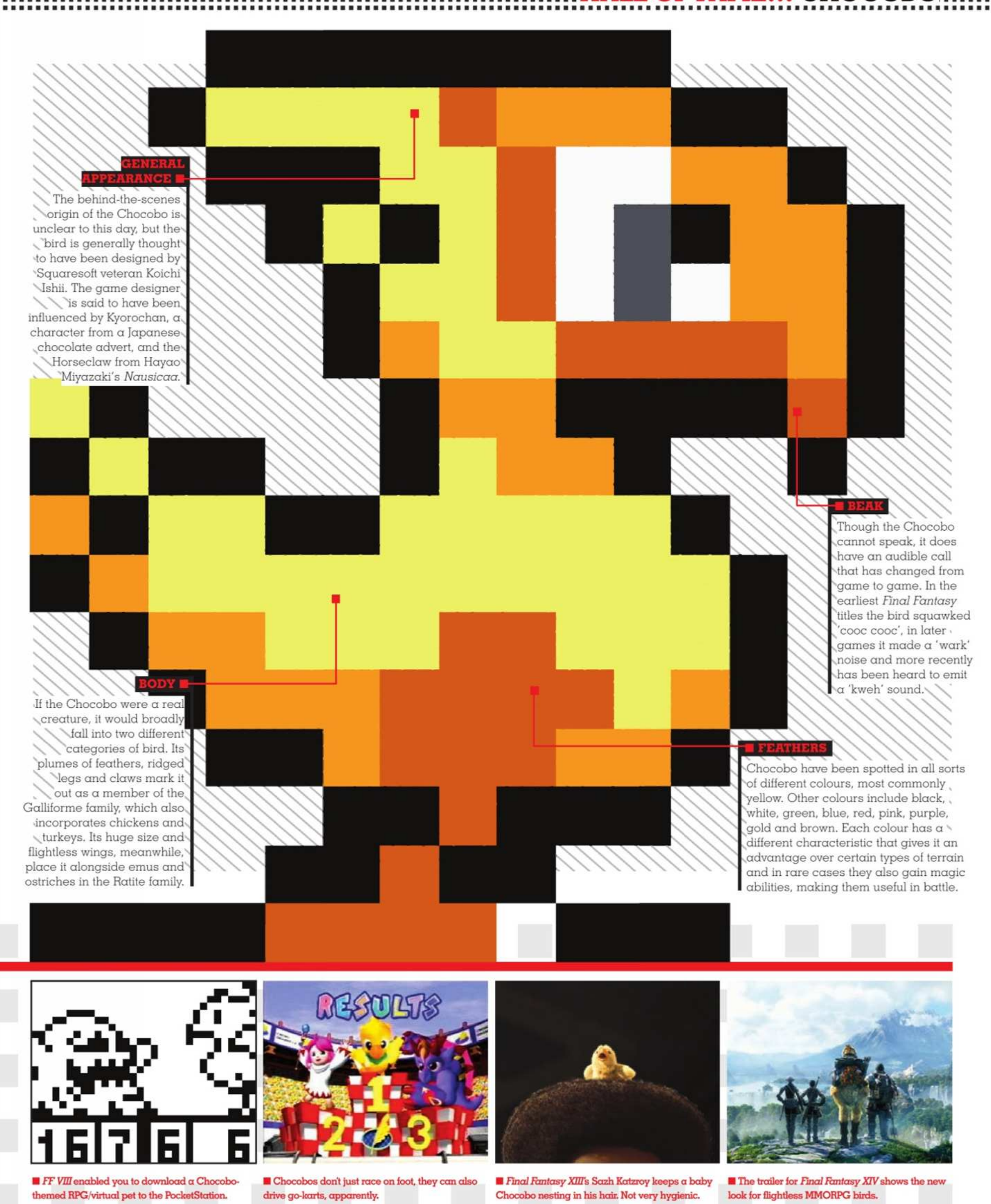
The PC version of *FF VII* opens with a flock of Chocobo sprinting past the Squaresoft logo.



The Chocobo/Mog summon randomly throws out the Fat Chocobo in *FF*'s *VII* and *VIII*.



A day at the races in *Final Fantasy VII*'s Gold Saucer resort. Go on, Cloud.



GENERAL APPEARANCE

The behind-the-scenes origin of the Chocobo is unclear to this day, but the bird is generally thought to have been designed by Squaresoft veteran Koichi Ishii. The game designer is said to have been influenced by Kyorochan, a character from a Japanese chocolate advert, and the Horseclaw from Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaa*.

BEAK

Though the Chocobo cannot speak, it does have an audible call that has changed from game to game. In the earliest *Final Fantasy* titles the bird squawked 'cooc cooc', in later games it made a 'wark' noise and more recently has been heard to emit a 'kweh' sound.

BODY

If the Chocobo were a real creature, it would broadly fall into two different categories of bird. Its plumes of feathers, ridged legs and claws mark it out as a member of the Galliforme family, which also incorporates chickens and turkeys. Its huge size and flightless wings, meanwhile, place it alongside emus and ostriches in the Ratite family.

FEATHERS

Chocobo have been spotted in all sorts of different colours, most commonly yellow. Other colours include black, white, green, blue, red, pink, purple, gold and brown. Each colour has a different characteristic that gives it an advantage over certain types of terrain and in rare cases they also gain magic abilities, making them useful in battle.

■ *FF VIII* enabled you to download a Chocobo-themed RPG/virtual pet to the PocketStation.

■ Chocobos don't just race on foot, they can also drive go-karts, apparently.

■ *Final Fantasy XIII*'s Sazh Katzroy keeps a baby Chocobo nesting in his hair. Not very hygienic.

■ The trailer for *Final Fantasy XIV* shows the new look for flightless MMORPG birds.

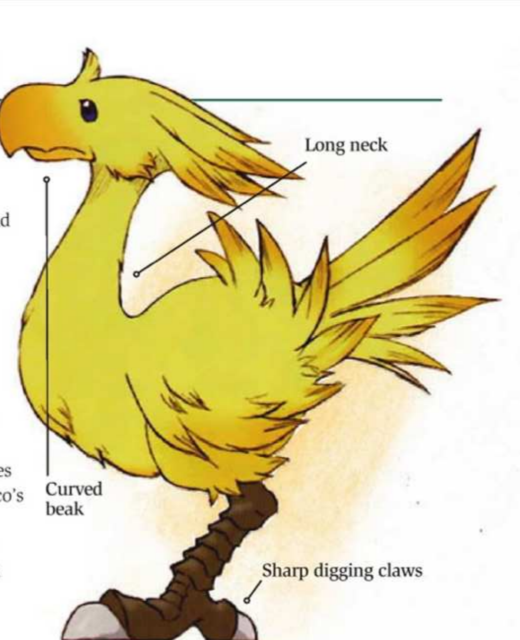


THE BIRD WATCHER'S GUIDE TO FINAL FANTASY

SPANNING MULTIPLE TIMELINES AND REALITIES, EACH FINAL FANTASY CONTAINS ITS OWN WORLD RULES, RACES AND POLITICS. AND THOUGH CHOCOBOS ARE ONE OF THE FEW THINGS TO APPEAR REGULARLY THROUGHOUT THE SERIES, EACH HAS ITS OWN DISTINGUISHING FEATURES. HERE'S YOUR GUIDE TO SOME OF THE MOST INTERESTING BREEDS AND A FEW SPECIAL BIRDS THAT BECAME CHARACTERS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT

Choco

■ Appearing in *FF IX*'s largest side quest, Hot And Cold, Choco helps lead character Zidane dig for maps known as Chocographs. These maps help Zidane search for treasure in the overworld. Choco can also locate a treasure that will transport him to Fat Chocobo, who uses magic to change Choco's colour, granting him the ability to traverse different terrains with ease.

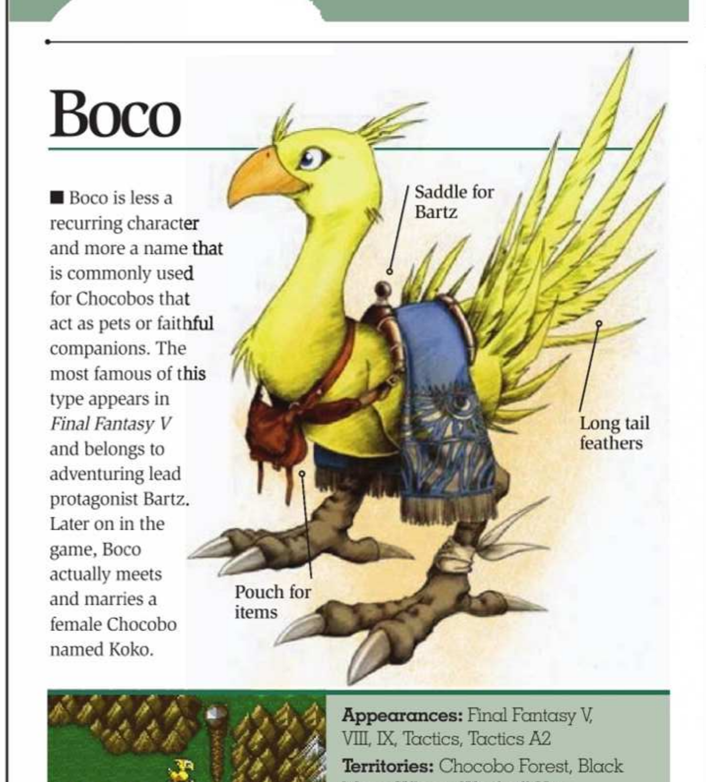




Appearances: Final Fantasy IX
Territories: Chocobo Forest, Chocobo Lagoon
Colours: Yellow, light blue, red, navy blue, gold

Boco

■ Boco is less a recurring character and more a name that is commonly used for Chocobos that act as pets or faithful companions. The most famous of this type appears in *Final Fantasy V* and belongs to adventuring lead protagonist Bartz. Later on in the game, Boco actually meets and marries a female Chocobo named Koko.



Appearances: Final Fantasy V, VIII, IX, Tactics, Tactics A2
Territories: Chocobo Forest, Black Mage Village, Windmill Hut
Colours: Yellow

Chocobo

■ The star of the Chocobo spin-off games goes by the name of Poulet in his debut appearance but is confusingly and simply named Chocobo in all subsequent appearances. Much more adorable and kiddie-friendly than his *Final Fantasy* counterpart, this sweet little Chocobo also gets to enjoy a much more diverse set of videogame genres, including roguelikes, kart racers and even mini-game collections.





Appearances: Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon 1 and 2, Chocobo Racing, Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales and Chocobo's Dungeon
Territories: Dungeons, Race Tracks
Colours: Yellow

Tactical Chocobo

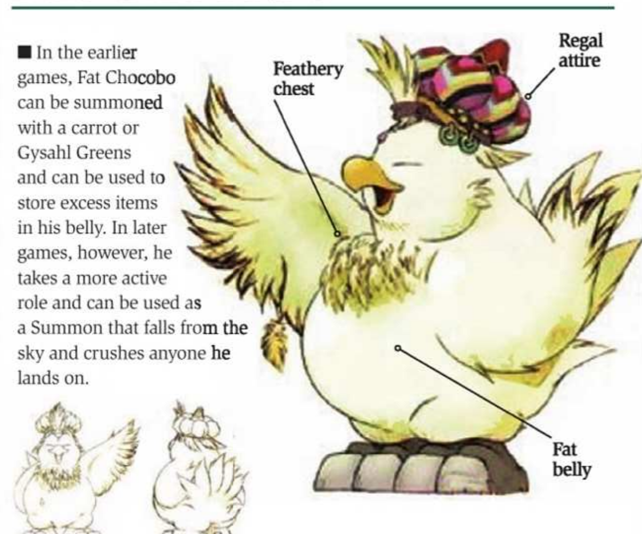
■ Appearing as enemies, the Chocobo can be mounted and used in battle by any character in *FF T*. In *FF TA2*, only a Moogle with the job title of Chocobo Knight may mount a battle-weakened bird. The colour of each Chocobo affects movement abilities and combat skills as well as the type of magic attacks they are able to use.



Appearances: Final Fantasy Tactics, Final Fantasy Tactics A2
Territories: Ivalice, Jylland
Colours: Yellow, black, red, green, brown, white

Fat Chocobo

■ In the earlier games, Fat Chocobo can be summoned with a carrot or Gysahl Greens and can be used to store excess items in his belly. In later games, however, he takes a more active role and can be used as a Summon that falls from the sky and crushes anyone he lands on.





Appearances: Final Fantasy III, IV, V, VII, VIII, IX, Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon
Territories: Chocobo Forests, Chocobo Towns
Colours: Yellow

Vana'diel Chocobo

■ Originally used as a mode of transport, the role of the MMO Chocobo increased greatly with subsequent expansion packs, which added the ability to breed Chocobo and, later, race them against other players. The most interesting thing about Vana'diel's Chocobo is that breeds significantly differ in size and shape depending on the race they serve.

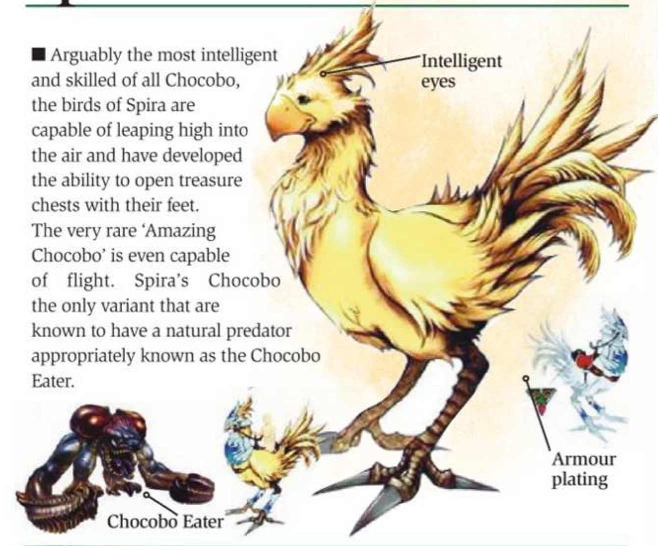




Appearances: Final Fantasy XI
Territories: Vana'diel, La Theine Plateau
Colours: Yellow, red, black, purple, green, gold, blue, brown

Spira Chocobo

■ Arguably the most intelligent and skilled of all Chocobo, the birds of Spira are capable of leaping high into the air and have developed the ability to open treasure chests with their feet. The very rare 'Amazing Chocobo' is even capable of flight. Spira's Chocobo the only variant that are known to have a natural predator appropriately known as the Chocobo Eater.





Appearances:
Final Fantasy X, X-2
Territories:
Mi'ihen Highroad, Spira
Colours:
Yellow, white, gold, brown



Sonic Yoot

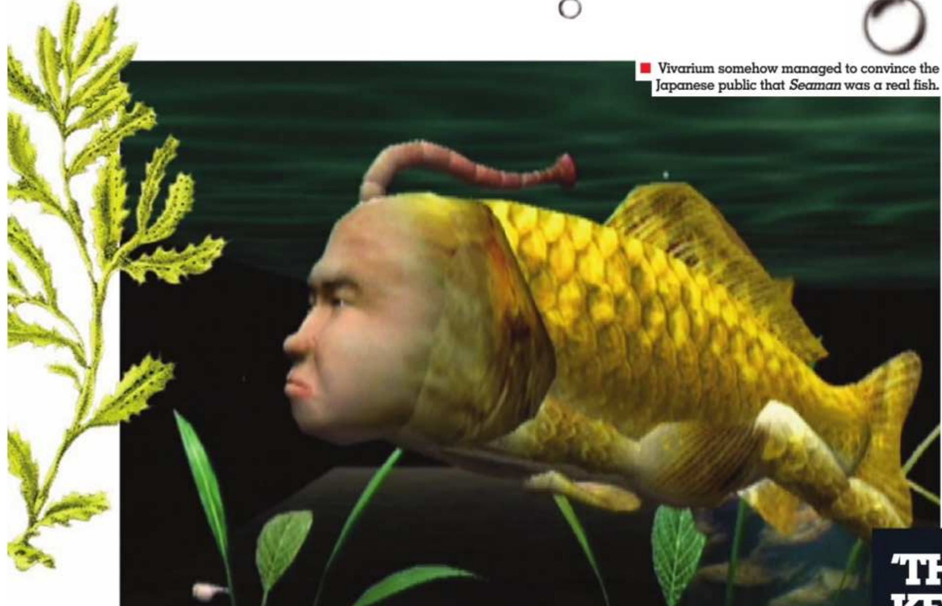
games™ meets noted author, game designer, philosopher, photographer and staunch Apple enthusiast Yoot Saito to discuss simulation games, voice recognition and acerbic-talking fish men

YOOT SAITO IS an intellectual. He has a number of books to his name, he attended a prestigious Tokyo university, and is full of wit and spark. He is also a playful, occasionally impertinent individual for whom videogames represent a unique creative outlet, and this has led to his gameography consisting largely of titles that are either difficult or impossible to categorise. There are common themes to be found throughout his oeuvre – communication, simulation, unusual player-character relationships – but the general rule with games from Vivarium (Saito's Tokyo studio) is to expect originality in its boldest form.

Saito's further education was spent at Tokyo's Waseda University, where he studied science, engineering and architecture. Perhaps surprisingly, he was not at all interested in producing games while he was a student. "I thought games as a form of entertainment were a waste of time," Saito reflects. Fortunately for anyone who has ever experienced the unhinged joy of a Saito production, his stance soon changed when he discovered what he describes as the "wonderful presentation techniques" of simulation games. In particular, one title had a profound effect on his appreciation of this medium: "Experiencing *SimCity* on a Mac with a monochrome screen was what motivated me to want to produce games. I had played many other games before that, but I hadn't been interested in making my own games until that point. I think that's why, even now, my productions are always strongly coloured with values that are important to the simulation genre."

After graduating from Waseda, Saito immediately found employment at a publishing house. "This was a really big company I had joined," he recalls. "I was part of a team that was researching 'The Future of Information Media and New CONTINUED »


SONIC YOOT



■ Vivarium somehow managed to convince the Japanese public that *Seaman* was a real fish.



■ Yoot Saito isn't just an inventive game designer, he's also the author of two books.

Business'. My first game was a Mac/DOS title put out by this company… Under the pretence of it being a project linked in with 'The Future of Information Media', it was released as something termed 'Simulation Media'. While I was working on that title, I was always thinking ahead and looking for new themes. One of those ideas I had was simply 'elevators and skyscrapers'. In the end, this publisher refused me the right to make a new title on the grounds that it was 'not a games company', so I didn't hang around there for long. Instead I became independent and produced *The Tower* at my own expense."

The Tower (see Climbing The Tower) was a hugely successful venture: not only did it do brisk trade in Japan, but it also earned an award from the Nikkei newspaper for its creator and, eventually, went on to become an international bestseller thanks in part to the attention it received from a certain sim design demigod. Saito says: "As soon as the Mac version became a hit in Japan, the president of Maxis, Jeff [Braun], got in touch with me. The author of *SimCity*, Will Wright, apparently told him that my game was 'interesting', so Maxis immediately decided to contact me to discuss the prospect of a worldwide release for *The Tower*. As *Sim Tower*, it became a big hit in Europe and the States. I feel really honoured by that."

■■■ UNFORTUNATELY FOR SAITO, his newfound international publishing ally was about to be absorbed by Electronic Arts. From a Western perspective this would perhaps not appear to be a major obstacle to an ascendant indie developer, yet cultural and linguistic factors here conspired to prevent Saito from building on his initial success with *Sim Tower*. "Once Maxis was drawn in by EA, I didn't really know

'THAT'S HORRIBLE!' HE KEPT ON YELLING. THIS INTENSE REACTION WAS A GOOD SIGN

who I should speak to about doing another game. I wanted to work on various other projects [with EA], but when things turn into big business, especially as far as we Japanese are concerned – because of the language barrier – we can't just pick up the phone and talk. So a lot of chances go begging, which is a real shame."

Worse, things at OPeNBooK, the development studio Saito had founded upon leaving his first employer, began to deteriorate after an ill-advised merger compromised the company's values. "OPeNBooK was the first development studio I had established," Saito says, "and I still think of it as though it were a child of mine. The inspiration behind the naming of

YOOT IN PRINT

The other string to Yoot Saito's bow

■■■ SAITO HAS written two books on the subject of Apple. The first deals with Apple's early presence in Japan. "I found an old Apple II for sale as junk in Akihabara," he says, "and on the back of the unit there was a sticker of Toray [a large Japanese synthetic fibre manufacturer], which read 'Master Distributer'. I had a great degree of familiarity with Toray, but I found it really strange that the company had at some point been marketing Apple II hardware. This had evidently occurred before I had even thought of buying a Mac/Apple, so I started to ask older Mac users about this. My research eventually turned into a book, written from a perspective that explains how the seemingly strong-willed, extravagant Apple brand was being carelessly brandished by this large Japanese company. That made for a very amusing story.

The other book I penned," Saito continues, "stems from a strong desire to meet and talk directly with the people behind the creation of Apple, the Macintosh, the mouse, and so on. A magazine called *MacWorld* (Japan) was producing a tenth anniversary special issue to celebrate the inception of the Macintosh, so I pitched a feature article where I would interview these people. Apart from that chance, I thought there wouldn't ever be another opportunity for me to talk with those people. Anyway, I was able to interview about 15 people thanks to this opportunity. In preparation for those interviews, I read through every available reference/document many times, just like a university student preparing for an exam. I then spent a few months going around the west coast of America. I discovered the history of the invention of modern computers there. I still treasure the knowledge I acquired from those interviews."



For Japanese Ears Only

The evolution of Yoot Saito's Seaman

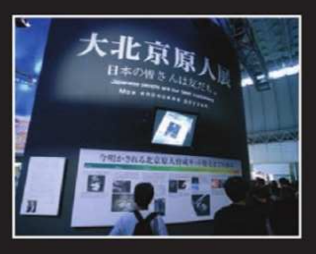
"Voice recognition technology can never be 100 per cent complete," says Saito. "Even humans can't recognise everything. Therefore, in many instances voice recognition is not so much a technical matter as it is one of exercising the user's mentality. I learned various things from the experience of developing *Seaman*," he concludes, and it's clear that the benefit of these lessons was utilised in the creation of *Seaman 2*, which appeared in Japan as a PS2 release in 2007. Unlike the original, the sequel leaps out of the water and finds the player interacting with a Peking Man in a tropical island setting. Alas, there are no plans for an English-language release of *Seaman 2*, although the thematically similar *Gabo* would have been released internationally were it not for Apple's decision to refuse its presence in the App Store.



Seaman 2 put in a couple of strong showings at TGS 2006 and 2007.



The sequel made use of the mic accessory bundled with the PS2 adaptation of the original.



Vivarium and Sega promoted *Seaman 2* at Tokyo Game Show 2006.



CLIMBING THE TOWER

THE GAME THAT landed Saito a Best Young Manager/Venture Of The Year award from the Nihon Keizai Shinbun is a simulation of "towers and elevators", where the objective is to build and maintain a multi-faceted skyscraper. "*The Tower* was initially a Mac game," Saito says, "and it was produced by a two-man team – me and a freelance programmer called Abe-san. I did the basic graphic design. First I made a basic scaled design in monochrome, setting it in motion with a Hyper Card. Next I coloured it with 16 colours, checking the presentation made clear to the user the intended difference between buildings such as offices and hotels. Towards the end of development, the Mac's performance was starting to increase, so to switch the designs I'd produced in 16-colour mode to 256 colours, I enlisted the help of designer Horita-san. Thanks to his craft, *The Tower* featured some lovely palette animation, and the day-to-day happenings within the buildings were presented in vivid detail." The game debuted on OS9 and Windows 95 in 1994. Locally, Japanese Saturn and 3DO versions of *The Tower* were released in 1996. Rebranded as *Sim Tower* for its release in the West, *The Tower* also spawned a number of sequels.

the company was that I wanted to take some valuable knowledge that had been thoughtlessly abandoned in the recesses of a laboratory, and freely distribute it to people in a format they could easily understand."

For a while things seemed to be progressing in line with Saito's aspirations. Eventually, though, a bad decision or two led to Saito becoming disillusioned with what he had created: "Unfortunately we ended up merging with another studio and the atmosphere turned sour. The development studio is like an orchestra or a band – it has to stick with one concept. When there are continual member changes, the studio will die."

LUCKILY, SAITO – dismayed and at a loose end – upped and exchanged Tokyo for the West Coast, home of his beloved Apple. This, in turn, led to the creation of Saito's most famous work. "After the merger," he reflects, "OPeNBooK suddenly had a far greater number of older employees. I tried to make good use of their potential by increasing the volume of things we were planning to do as a company. Yet even though I was the majority shareholding owner, it became really difficult for me to continue working with this company. Because of this I decided to go to California and set up a new studio there. That's where *Seaman* was developed initially: it was being produced with the American market in mind. After a while, Sega requested that I return to Japan and complete *Seaman* as a Dreamcast game. I had no desire to return to OPeNBooK, so that's when I formed the Vivarium studio. This studio's atmosphere was far livelier and full of energy: we felt strongly from the start that we were making new things."



Leonard Nimoy recording narration for *Seaman* in 1999.

Saito relates how Shoichiro Irimajiri (who was guiding the company through a transitional period as the Saturn was phased out and the Dreamcast beamed in) instigated this deal: "When I was making *Seaman* in California, I had a phone call from Sega president Irimajiri-san. 'Let's have dinner', he said. It was my birthday, as it happens, and so we went to a sushi bar and talked about various things. I had my Powerbook with me and it contained a prototype of *Seaman*, so I showed this to him and – perhaps partly because we were in this sushi bar, surrounded by and eating raw fish – he repeatedly shot back with 'That's horrible!' He kept on yelling 'Horrible!' This intense reaction was a good sign, though. It convinced me that this game could sell. Then, later that night, he proposed that I develop *Seaman* for the Katana [Dreamcast's codename at the time]. Irimajiri-san had been president of Honda America and was a genius of an engineer, but while he was knowledgeable about computer stuff, it seems he'd never seen such strange software – apparently that's why he was so interested in it."

Curious as it may have seemed at the time, *Seaman* was born of Saito's realisation of the bizarre potential in a slightly modified pet/owner relationship. "The reason that I unified a human character with a fish was simple," Saito explains. "It struck me that when I was in my own room, in my own private environment, I was being peeped at by a pet… and if you put that in words it sounded quite shocking. To that concept I just added a face and a voice to a pet designated as a tropical fish that lived in a fish tank. More than the concept itself, the fact that so many people collaborated to complete the production of a game based on this apparently stupid joke of an idea made it a very significant project."

Saito's "stupid joke" of a game concept was fresh and unique: Aki Maita's Tamagotchi CONTINUED >.

PINBALL WIZARDRY

The making of RTS/pinball hybrid Odama

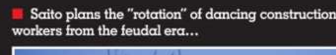
"I APPROACHED NINTENDO with the concept for *Odama*," Saito reveals. "I made the suggestion to them many times over." Eventually they bought the idea, and Saito's unique approach to pinball/RTS made novel use of Nintendo's plug-in microphone released for use with GameCube software. "Communication between the player and the game is vital," he says. "I don't like games that contain movie sequences. Such games make for experiences where the player's existence seems to be insufficient. Games should be designed from the ear. It goes without saying that the ear is an input. When the audio is interesting, the game changes into something that's very novel and original. Nintendo showed that it recognised this through the development of game hardware where that cooped-up feeling was surmounted by the addition of touchpens, nunchuks, and so on."



Odama featured some imaginative levels towards the end, but few people persevered long enough to see them.



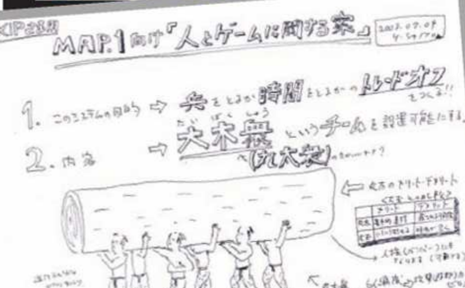
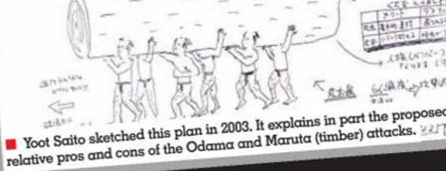
This overview of *Odama*'s distinct appeal was prepared for *Famitsu*, first printed in promotion of the game's 2003 release.



Saito plans the "rotation" of dancing construction workers from the feudal era…



…and jots a human bridge…

Yoot Saito sketched this plan in 2003. It explains in part the proposed relative pros and cons of the Odama and Maruta (timber) attacks.

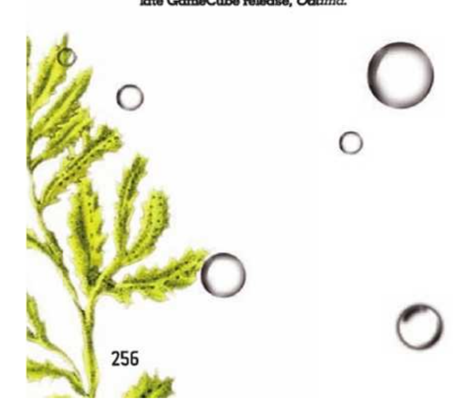


A scene from Vivarium's underperforming late GameCube release, *Odama*.

phenomenon had already been established in Japan a few years earlier, but to categorise *Seaman* merely as a similar type of 'virtual pet' would be wide of the mark. The player-character relationship proposed in *Seaman* is unique and is moored in Saito's own dry sense of humour. To an extent, however, Dreamcast hardware and sound library limitations necessitated *Seaman*'s notoriously acerbic turn of phrase, as Saito explains: "I think that players wish for relationships with characters who will actually come to life for them. In order to make the player think of the character as a sentient being, the player's conversation must be seen to be understood: the dialogue should be similar to that of a movie, with the player feeling as though the other party really understands what he/she is saying. In order to realise that no matter how we went about it, *Seaman* ended up speaking in a harsh and scathing manner… just like a mother scolding her son. But that harshness is actually underlined by affection, so when you hear it it's not something that makes you feel upset. It's not slander. It's a warning for the sake of the person who is being admonished. That's why *Seaman* doesn't merely say impolite things – he also praises and peps up the user. However, players had never previously been admonished from within the screen of a game, so I think that's why it made such a great impression on people."

SUPPORT FROM SEGA was crucial because of the scale of Vivarium's ambition. "Thinking back now," Saito muses, "I suppose developing *Seaman* was a very difficult job, but at the time it was also a lot of fun. Nervous excitement has a magical power in that it makes difficult work feel easy. We overcame many hurdles I think. First we had to persuade Sega to help with mic input and with the preparation of a voice-recognition library. Those were big things. Happily, Sega gave us support whenever we needed it. I'm grateful for that. However, I didn't realise this at the time, but I was apparently teased a lot by Sega staff as they were saying 'There's no way that repulsive-looking thing can ever be a hit'. [Laughs.] Certainly there wasn't any previous record of a disgusting, cheeky game character landing a hit with a home console game, so I suppose you could argue that the teasing was justified."

Despite Sega staffers' derision, *Seaman* became one of the first significant Dreamcast successes in Japan, selling nearly four hundred thousand copies and in the process becoming an unlikely social and cultural phenomenon. That its rapid uptake by all corners of Japanese society can be attributed to the ingenious marketing tactics of its creator is truly remarkable. Saito himself explains his actions: "I fabricated a foolish-sounding story to expound the obviously spurious claim that 'This mysterious fish once really existed'. I next came up with a way to surreptitiously get this reported in the media as fact. The story would be the basis of the trick, so I put a great amount of work into research before creating the story. A little while after *Seaman* went on sale, Japanese TV stations began to play along with the joke – they also mixed in their own humour – and in the end, thanks to this fanciful story being reported in the media, lots of people started to actually believe it. '*Seaman*, that fish, really existed' became




CONVINCING NINTENDO TO SPEAK

Saito was consulted on audio issues during the development of the Wii Remote: "When I was asked 'Saito-san, what kind of things would you like to use this Wii controller for?' I answered 'I want to use it as a mobile phone'. You see, to my eyes the Wii Remote is shaped just like a mobile phone. I was at a yakinikku [Korean BBQ] restaurant in Kyoto with Shigeru Miyamoto and Satoru Iwata, and there I strongly put across my idea that while attaching a microphone to the Wii Remote's expansion port would not be a problem, it would be far better to make sure the Remote featured a built-in speaker that could easily be brought next to one's ear. The finished Wii hardware and various mock-ups, as well as details of basic methods it used, had already been announced to the press a few days earlier, so at first Iwata-san and Miyamoto-san seemed to be thinking, 'You're asking us to do this now?' Later on, however, after we'd talked a great deal about the idea, it seems their switches were flicked. As we were finishing our meal, I went to the toilet and when I returned to the table I found them talking enthusiastically, which is when I realised they were going to run with my idea. Still, it goes without saying that it was Nintendo who made the decision and took the risk. In that regard, the decisiveness of Nintendo's people is terrific."

The concept art for Saito's *Odama* depicts the bizarre human drama that is only seen from far above in game.

something of an urban legend. Of course I knew that eventually I'd be found out, but I think intelligent people appreciated the joke and as a result were attracted to the game."

DEVELOPING SEAMAN WAS A DIFFICULT JOB, BUT AT THE TIME IT WAS ALSO A LOT OF FUN

SEAMAN'S SUCCESS IN Japan was "far in excess" of Saito's expectations, paving the way for a Japan-only sequel on the PlayStation 2. Even today, a decade on from *Seaman*'s appearance in the public consciousness, it remains a well-known property in Japan. For its creator, the public's reaction was particularly rewarding: "Major comedians were presenting *Seaman* parody material on national television, and when a famous baseball player was recuperating from an injury, he told reporters that he was spending his time with *Seaman*... it had clearly become something of a social phenomenon. I remember many instances when I would be having a drink in a bar and the people sat next to me would come out with things like 'I'm playing *Seaman*, and you'll never guess what he said to me today…' Overhearing such conversations and seeing the reactions of celebrities was a real privilege for me as the game's creator."

After developing *Seaman 2* (see For Japanese Ears Only) and *Odama* (see Pinball Wizardry), Saito and his team came full circle to again develop a videogame for one of Apple's platforms. *Gabo* is/was an iPhone game that is loosely related to *Seaman 2*, and yet for some strange reason it was turned away by the App Store gatekeepers. Looking to the future, Yoot Saito has found an altogether new objective: "I would like to make films. It's a dream I've had since being a child, and I'm now proceeding with preparations for that. I think I've learned an awful lot from developing games, particularly in terms of story composition and techniques for generating empathy, and now I'd like to apply those things to film production."

GIFT OF THE GABO

The Vivarium iPhone game you'll never get to play

WITH THE PEKING Man of *Seaman 2* reappearing as its protagonist, *Gabo* was intended to be a portable extension of some of the basics of Vivarium's previous titles. Unfortunately, Apple rejected it citing "unpleasant presentation". Saito has since given up on attempting to release *Gabo*. "I sense that Apple is becoming more conservative than Nintendo," Saito says. "I can only wait until there is some new blood there – people who can accurately evaluate a game. I'm working far away from iPhone now, but I hope to return with a new idea and make a fresh attempt to release an iPhone game."

In spite of his frustrations with the *Gabo* experience, Saito remains an admirer of the iPhone as a development platform: "Its high level of compatibility and elasticity sets it apart from the likes of the DSi."



Perhaps little Gabo was too underdressed to be accepted by Apple's QA department.



We think the world of Saito's games, so let's hope he returns with a new iPhone project soon.







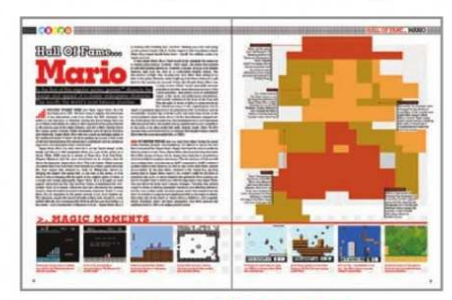


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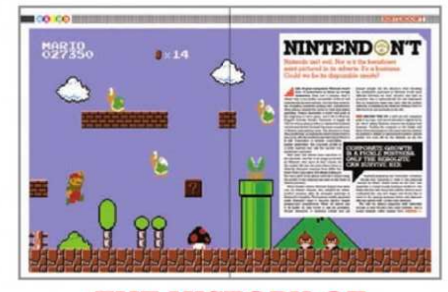
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- Comix Zone
- Zombies Ate My Neighbors



HALL OF FAME
- Super Mario Bros
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